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MR. HOGARTH'S WILL.

BY

CATHERINE HELEN SPENCE.

AUTHOR OF "CLARA MORRISON," "TENDER AND TRUE,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE
How Francis Received the Good News . . . 1

CHAPTER II.

Jane's Situation 19

CHAPTER III.

Elsie's Situation 56

CHAPTER IV.

Elsie Refuses an Excellent Offer 68

CHAPTER V.

Elsie Accepts of a New Situation 87

CHAPTER VI.

A Letter from Australia for Francis, which causes Surprise in an Unexpected Quarter . 97

CHAPTER VII.

Harriett Phillips does a Little Bit of Shopping, which is somewhat Fatal to her Projects . 119

CHAPTER VIII.

PAGE

Francis makes a Favourable Impression on Harriett Phillips 135

CHAPTER IX.

A Bonnet Gained and a Lover Lost . . . 154

CHAPTER X.

A Seance 164

CHAPTER XI.

Spiritualism, Love, and Politics 178

CHAPTER XII.

Chiefly Political 188

CHAPTER XIII.

Good-bye 202

CHAPTER XIV.

Francis Hogarth's Canvass and Election . . 221

CHAPTER XV.

Mrs. Phillips's First Grief 257

CHAPTER XVI.

Another Good-bye 276

MR. HOGARTH'S WILL.

CHAPTER I.

HOW FRANCIS RECEIVED THE GOOD NEWS.

When Francis, after a night's rest disturbed by thoughts and calculations as to ways and means, had arrived at the definite resolution to ask Jane Melville to marry him, he recalled a thousand signs of her affectionate regard for him—of her understanding his character as no one ever cared to understand it before—of her sympathy with all his past life and his present position, which left him no doubt that she would return his love and accept of him. The home and the welcome he was prepared to offer to Elsie would plead with her own heart in his favour. All her theoretical objections as to cousins marrying (which after all is a very doubtful point, and has much to be said on both sides); all her ambition for himself would melt away before the warmth of the truest love and the hope of the happiest home in the world. And yet she was not to be won entirely, or even chiefly, by personal pleadings for happiness, or by the feeling that her life and Elsie's might go on smoothly and cheerfully with him. She was to be convinced that it was right that she should marry him, and then the whole of her affectionate and ardent nature would abandon itself to the pleasure of loving and being beloved. It was because she had no husband to occupy her heart that she dwelt so fondly on those abstractions of public duty and social progress, and he would convince her that out of an aggregate of happy homes a happy people is composed. She had found opportunities both of gaining knowledge and of doing good in the most unfavourable circumstances, and she would have more chances as his wife, with his co-operation and sympathy.

She was not the sort of woman his poetical and artistic dreams had been wont to draw as the partner of his life; not the lovely, clinging, dependent girl who would look up to him for counsel and support, but something better, both in herself and for him, than his fancy had ever painted. Her powers of sympathy had been increased by her knowledge; she was as just as she was generous. There was no corner of his heart he could not lay bare to her; no passage of his past life that he could not trust to her judging fairly and charitably. Whether he rose or fell in the world; whether he gained social influence or lost it in the career that he had again to begin, her foot would be planted firmly beside his; her insight and sympathy would heighten every enjoyment and fortify him for every trial. That he felt her to be beautiful, perhaps, was more in his powers of seeing than in her positive charm of countenance; but so far as the soul looked through her eyes and breathed from her lips, she had a sort of beauty that did not weary any intelligent gazer, and at all events, which could never weary Francis Hogarth. After all the flattery he had met with since his accession to fortune, and the conventionalisms of society in which he had been plunged, he felt the transparent sincerity of Jane's character something to rest in with perfect confidence and perfect satisfaction. The most brilliant Frenchwomen had not her earnestness or her power, though they had far more vivacity, and made their interlocutors more satisfied with themselves. And Francis felt that he ought to be married; and how could he ever attach himself sufficiently to any other woman and not draw comparisons between her and the woman whom his interest—his worldly interest alone—forbade him to make his wife? He must learn to love Jane less, or obtain from herself leave to love her more.

Jane's joyous greeting, when he came to Peggy's for his cousins, to take them to the Exhibition, startled him not a little; and when she eagerly told him of Mr. Brandon's views for her future advancement; and that both he and Peggy had no doubt that she would suit the Phillipses; and that an answer was sure to be had in a few days, and demanded his congratulations on her altered prospects; then asked him to submit his plans for cottages to Peggy's inspection, as she was by far the most competent judge as to their merits or deficiencies. Old Thomas Lowrie was also taken into council, and his wondering admiration of the bonny slated houses was something worth seeing. Peggy's suggestion of the addition of a little storeroom, in which milk and meal and potatoes could be kept, was put and carried unanimously. They then went into the allotment questions, and Jane, Elsie, and Peggy, offered their opinions as to the fittest persons for the boon, and then began to wonder how many years it would be before they could make the land pay. All this, which ought to have gratified Francis—for every man should be glad when people take an interest in his plans—struck a chill to his heart, for it boded no good to his new visions.

"You seem to be in great spirits altogether, to-day, Jane," said he.

"How can I help it? The prospect of a situation of fifty or sixty pounds a year is something overpoweringly delightful to me. If I had heard of such a thing six months ago, I should have been glad, but now that I have felt the difficulty of getting any employment whatever, and feel quite sure that I am fit for this, my only dread is lest Mr. Phillips may have got another person, or may not like my appearance; but if he is satisfied to engage me I am determined to save money to start in business. By and by we are going to join Peggy in Melbourne."

"But your sister—how do you feel about leaving her?"

"I was quite aware that I must leave her if I meant to do anything of any value for myself."

"I am never going to stand in Jane's light any more," said Elsie. "I am not so selfish as to regret any piece of good fortune that comes to her alone."

"And I think of inquiring a little further as to her poems," said Jane.

"Oh, no! that is altogether useless," said Elsie.

"You promised yesterday to let Francis see them to-day, Elsie. We must have his opinion on this subject. I certainly think I could do more personally, than by letter, to get them published."

"And Jane always wished so much to see London," said Elsie. "I am so glad to think she has such a prospect, and from all Peggy's accounts of Mr. Phillips, he is everything that could be wished. How little we thought when we listened to her long tale about her taking such care of Emily and Harriett Phillips, the first night we came to live here, that she was saving pupils for Jane. It seems like a fate."

"Then what are *you* going to do?" said Francis, who did not seem so much delighted with Jane's good news as she had expected. "Are you to live here with Peggy, as before?"

"Not just as before. I am going to Mrs. Dunn's through the day, and Peggy is good enough to say she will be glad to keep me, though I lose my better half in Jane. I think I really have some taste and talent for millinery, and I mean to try to cultivate it; for if we begin business together in Melbourne, it may be very useful. Jane and I lay awake half the night, talking over our plans, and I do not see why we should not make our way in time."

"Then, you are going to forget the Muses altogether, and give your whole soul to business?"

"Did you not do that every day, cousin Francis, when you were at the Bank?" said Elsie.

"Perhaps you may write better poetry when you do not make it your day's work. Do you not think she may, Francis?" said Jane.

"Very probably—very probably she may;" said Francis, thoughtfully, as if he were weighing the advantages of literature being a staff, over its being a crutch, but in reality he was not thinking of Elsie or her verses, at all.

He had prepared himself to make a great sacrifice—to do something very generous and Quixotic—not altogether uninfluenced by the wish for personal happiness of the highest kind; but yet he believed that his chief motives for taking the resolution were the forlorn and hopeless situation of the two girls. Now they were no longer forlorn or hopeless. If this situation for Jane was obtained, and Elsie persevered in her determination to work hard at the perfecting of her taste for making caps and bonnets, they had a definite plan of life, likely to be as prosperous as that he could offer to them. And Jane would not accept of him to-day, though she would probably have done so yesterday. His plans, his ambitions, were too dear to her to be thrown away lightly, and he could see nothing but sisterly affection in her eyes. If she took the position she was entitled to at Mr. Phillips's, she was likely to meet with some society there, and Mr. Brandon, or some other

Australian settler, not so shy of matrimony without a fortune on the lady's part, as the middle-class Englishman of this century is, might see some of the virtues and attractions which he had learned to love—no one could see so many of them as himself—and might win the best wife in the world, without being fully conscious of the blessing. He knew the real strength of his love, when he tried to fancy Jane the wife of any one else. He almost wished she might fail in her object, and that Mr. Phillips would decide that she would not suit. He was selfish enough to hope that she might not be happy there. They must continue to correspond as frequently and as openly as hitherto. He would watch for any turn that might offer him hope, and he must be all the more careful to disguise his real feelings, lest it might prevent her from expressing herself as frankly as she had done. When a blessing appears to be lost its value is greatly enhanced, and all the comforts, and privileges, and opportunities, of his present situation, that he had made such an effort to give up, seemed to shrink into insignificance, compared with the domestic happiness that was now eluding his grasp.

"There was great lamentation among the bairns this morning when I said something about Miss Jean maybe leaving us; but they took great comfort from the recollection that they had learned to write so well that they might send real post letters to her—not mere make-believes—and she promised to answer them. Tam says if she goes to London she must keep on the look-out for anything that is in his line, and indeed Miss Jean said she would. It is a real blessing that penny post. In my young days, to think of writing back and fore to London about anything ye wanted to know would have been out of the question for poor folk," said Peggy.

"You must write to me, too," said Francis, about all the things and all the people you see, and how you like them, and if you tire of London or of teaching—just every mood as you feel it. I do not think it was quite fair in you always showing me the brightest side of your life. I do not mean to show you always mine."

"When you are disappointed because the workmen will not build the cottages fast enough, or because the inhabitants do not keep them as clean as your fastidious taste thinks necessary, or because the dull Scottish brain will not readily take up the Flemish or French ideas you want to engraft in them, you will write all your indignant or disgusted expressions to me, rather than lose patience with the people themselves—it is safer. I am prepared for some disappointments, but I will wait patiently and in hope for the end."

"Did you always have this large amount of public spirit, Jane? It struck me very forcibly the first evening you spent with me at my house."

"I think it lay dormant for a few months before my uncle's death," said Jane, laughing; "but it came out stronger than ever afterwards. Francis is very grave to-day. I would not trust him with your verses, Elsie; his criticisms will be far too severe in his present mood."

"But I will trust him just at this very time," said Elsie; "for if this dull morning has made him a little depressed, perhaps he may feel a little for me sitting in my cheerless room, without hope and without society. I beg your pardon, Jane, you are always good and kind, and so was Peggy, and every one; but it was so dull —so very dull. But what I mean is, that if Francis is moody and dispirited, as a great many people are at times, my verses will not seem to him such a wail as to the busy, merry world we live in. I never saw a more favourable-looking critic."

Elsie then went to her drawer, and for the first time since she had tied up her manuscript touched it without a sick pang at her heart. The very sight of the enveloping brown paper had been odious to her; but to-day she felt courage enough to untie it, and to select a few of what she considered her best pieces for her cousin's perusal.

Much depends on the mood of the reader of poetry. Francis did not find Elsie's sad views of life at all overdrawn, and he pointed out both to her and to Jane many fine passages, and what he considered to be pretty images. Here and there he found fault; but, on the whole, he said Elsie's verses were full of promise, and she only had to wait patiently for awhile—to observe as well as to reflect, and not to be quite so subjective—to attain to excellence.

At the Exhibition and at the concert in the evening, Francis had again to admire the naturally fine taste of his younger cousin, and to lament with her that none of her talents had been cultivated. According to all his preconceived fancies, he should have fallen in love with Elsie; but it was not so. She was a sweet, amiable girl, with a great deal of quickness and undeveloped talent, but she was chiefly dear to him as Jane's sister. Elsie felt for the time restored to a better opinion of herself, and was grateful to the person who thought well of what the world seemed to despise. She was disposed now to do Francis justice, and more than justice. Never had she talked with a man of finer taste or more admirable judgment. She caught another glimpse of William Dalzell, who was at the concert with the Rennies and Miss Wilson, and contrasted her old favourite with her new, very much to the disadvantage of the former.

Francis was aware that this was the person from whose attentions Jane had been in such danger. He could scarcely conceive the possibility of a woman of such admirable sense and such penetration as Jane forming an attachment to one so shallow and so unheroic. He felt himself scarcely worthy of Jane Melville, and he would never compare himself with the Laird of Mosstower. But the young people had been thrown together, and had spent much of their time of meeting in the open air. William Dalzell was a good rider and a fearless sportsman; he rode a beautiful horse, and was very careful of it. He appeared to have a good temper, and his mother worshipped him, while Elsie was never weary of sounding his praises. Mr. Hogarth was in indifferent health, and was somewhat exacting at all times. He had not the sympathy with the high spirits of youth that he had had in former years, so that Jane had enjoyed the animated rides, where she did most of the talking to a listener, young, handsome, and determined to be pleased with everything she said and did. She thought she interested him in her favourite subjects; he had said that she improved him, and his mother said the same; so that she rejoiced in her influence, which seemed to bear such good results.

Miss Rennie, who had heard when in ——shire, a somewhat exaggerated account of young Dalzell's attachment to Miss Melville, was very much disgusted with his conduct, and though his attentions to Laura Wilson amused her very much, she had a grudge at him for their mercenary motives. Laura was evidently captivated at first sight; she could speak of nobody but Mr. Dalzell, and Mr. Rennie as her guardian was a little alarmed, but on inquiry he found that Moss Tower was not very deeply dipped after all; Mrs. Dalzell had her jointure off it, but he was an only son, and any little wildness or extravagance of youth was likely to be put an end to by marriage. Laura was a somewhat troublesome ward, so passionate and so self-willed that even at school she had carried her point against him by sheer determination over and over again, and he wished heartily to be well freed of her by marriage with a tolerably respectable man. Her fortune he would secure her future husband from making ducks and drakes of by settlements, which are generally in Britain framed as if the future husband was an enemy to be dreaded, and not a friend to be trusted. For the law as it stands puts such enormous power, not only over happiness (which is inevitable), but over property and liberty, into the hands of the husband, to be used against as well as for the advantage of the wife, that it is only by taking power from both, and vesting it in trustees, that money can be saved for the wife and children. In the cases where the marriage is a happy one, the settlement is a hindrance and a nuisance; but in such cases as that of William Dalzell and Laura Wilson, it would be prudent to evade the law of the land, and to preserve the property of the heiress by such means.

CHAPTER II.

JANE'S SITUATION.

In an almost incredibly short time, Mr. Brandon called at Peggy Walker's to say that he had had a letter from Mr. Phillips, who thought very favourably of Miss Melville from his description, but who would come to Edinburgh himself in a day or two and see the young lady, so as to judge for himself.

He came accordingly, but, to Peggy's great disappointment, without Emily or Harriett. They had both bad colds, and he could not make them travel in the depth of winter even to see Peggy. Jane and Elsie could not but admire the kindly greeting he gave to his old and faithful servant, and the interest he took in her affairs and her children, which was even more strongly expressed than Mr. Brandon's; and as for grandfather, he could not tell which of the two Australian gentlemen was the most polite.

The manners of the younger sister took Mr. Phillips's fancy more than those of the elder, but he saw that Jane would suit him best; so, in a much shorter time than she could have conceived possible, she found herself engaged to accompany him on his return to London, as housekeeper and governess, at a salary of 70*l.* a year.

"We mean to come to Edinburgh next summer, when we will probably take a tour in the Highlands, so that you have a prospect of seeing your sister then," said Mr. Phillips: "but I must have you with us as soon as possible, so I hope you will be ready the day after to-morrow."

"Yes, I will be quite ready then, said Jane. "I have not much to do, except to part from

Elsie, and that will be hard to do at last as at first."

While Mr. Phillips talked to Peggy about his children, and especially of Emily, the girls both examined his countenance and drew their conclusions as to his character. He was not so handsome as Mr. Brandon, being smaller and more insignificant-looking, and his fair complexion had not stood so well the constant exposure to the weather under an Australian sun as Mr. Brandon's dark one, but his smile was remarkably bright, and though his manner was very gentle and pleasing, he did not seem to want for decision of character.

"I doubt Emily is changed out of my knowledge. I have not seen her since she was four years and a half old, when you brought her to Melbourne for me to see, and when she coaxed me out of far more lollies than were good for her."

"I will bring her up in summer, and you will acknowledge that you would know her anywhere. As for you, she will know you quite well, for did not we get your likeness taken at the time, and she shows it to every one as that of her dear old nurse."

"I hope you're no spoiling the bairn."

"Oh! no, not much—at least, if we are, we we will get Miss Melville to counteract our bad treatment."

"You're no to make Miss Melville a terror—that's no fair. But the wee things after Harriett, how do you call them?"

"Constance, Hubert, and Eva."

"Well, they should save the eldest from being destroyed by foolish indulgence, for Emily and Harriett should be learned to give way to them."

"Everybody gives way to all of the five—but you must not say they are spoiled, either. Harriett and Emily, too, learned a lot of monkey tricks on board ship. The gentlemen took so much notice of them, and encouraged a good deal of impertinence in the children."

"A ship is a bad school for bairns," said Peggy. "Mine will be come some length before we go on board, and are not like to be so much taken notice of. Does Mrs. Phillips like England?"

"Very much, indeed. She will not go back with her own goodwill, and I hope not to need to return."

"All your friends are in this country," said Peggy, "and Mrs. Phillips will have so much new to see here that she will not regret the station. And how's Mrs. Bennett, is she still with you, and Martha, Mrs. Tuck they call her now?"

"They are both on the station yet, Peggy; Mrs. Bennett the same admirable woman she used to be, but one cannot advance her any way with such a poor creature of a husband. There is no rise in him; he is a shepherd, and a shepherd he will remain to the end of his days, spending his wages in an occasional spree, and then coming back to us to work for more; while that poor silly Martha happened on one of the best men about the place, and I have left him an under-overseer. If the two men could only have exchanged wives, things would appear more equitably arranged."

"Well," said Peggy, when Mr. Phillips had gone, "people can see other folks' blunders, but the man that I thought worst mated on the station was the master himself. You'll have to take high ground with Mrs. Phillips, Miss Melville, for if you give her an inch she will take an ell. As for him, he is everything that is reasonable; and the bairns, you must just make them mind you. But she is the one that will give you the most trouble."

When this engagement was entered into Jane accompanied Elsie to Mrs. Dunn's, who readily took her into her work-room, and was very much pleased to hear that Miss Melville had got such a desirable situation. The Rennies were also full of congratulations, and felt that their invitations and their getting the sisters an introduction to Mr. Brandon, had secured such a magnificent salary from another Australian millionaire. Miss Rennie was particularly pleased that she had dwelt so much on the misfortunes and talents of the sisters. The last evening Jane spent in Edinburgh was passed at the Rennies'; Mr. Brandon was asked to meet the girls he had been of such service to, and though Mr. Hogarth was rather dull, and Laura Wilson in a particularly unamiable mood, the liveliness of the Australian settler made it pass off very pleasantly.

Jane had not only Mr. Phillips, but Mr. Brandon also as travelling companion. Australians in England have a great tendency to fraternise, even though they were not much acquainted in the colony, and when his old neighbour returned to London, Brandon thought he could not do better than go with him, and go back to the north when it was not quite so cold. The gentlemen had a great deal to say to each other on matters both colonial and English. In English politics they took quite as great an interest as if they had never been out of Britain, and in Continental politics they took a greater interest than is usual with English people. Jane was occupied with her own thoughts. The parting from Elsie had been a sad one, so had the good-bye to Francis, who had said so much about her writing if she was unhappy, or if she did not think she could keep her situation with a lady of such a peculiar temper as Mrs. Phillips, that she could not help fearing herself for the permanency of the situation.

Nothing that had fallen from Peggy, or from Mr. Brandon either, had prepared Jane for the exceeding beauty of Mrs. Phillips. Jane never had seen a woman so strikingly handsome before. When she spoke the charm was somewhat broken, for her ideas were not brilliant, and she expressed herself in indifferent English; but in repose she was like a queen of romance. Tall and large, but exquisitely formed, with a soft creamy complexion, with a slight faint rose colour on the cheeks, and a more vivid red on the pouting lips, finely-shaped brown eyes, and a profusion of rippling dark brown hair, she certainly offered the fairest possible excuse for her husband's marrying beneath his rank—both social and intellectual. Such beauty as Mrs. Phillips's is a power, and Jane felt how difficult it would be to take high ground with so exquisite a creature. As Mr. Brandon said, she was handsomer than ever; the girlish beauty of sixteen, which she possessed when she captivated Mr. Phillips, had matured into the perfect beauty of womanhood. Though the mother of five children, she was not, and certainly did not look, twenty-seven. Emily was not so regularly handsome as her mother, but had more animation and more play of feature. Harriett would have been considered a pretty child in any other family, but she was quite a plain one in this.

No sooner had Mr. Phillips entered his house than Emily clung round his neck; Harriett mounted on one knee and played with his hair; Constance got on the other to have a little similar amusement with his beard and whiskers; Hubert clamoured for a ride on papa's foot; and little Eva cried to leave her nurse's arms to be taken up by him too.

"I was very glad to hear from Mr. Phillips, that you was coming, Miss Melville; the trouble of the house and the row of the children make it far too much for me, and when one comes home to England for a 'oliday, they want to have some peace," said Mrs. Phillips. "Now, Miss Emily, you must be on your good behaviour, now Miss Melville's come to be your governess."

"I'm sure I shan't behave any better to her than to my own dear papa," said Emily, with a storm of kisses.

"You're getting up to be a great girl. I'm sure Miss Melville will be quite shocked at your backwardness."

"She is a bush child," said Mr. Brandon, "and has been running wild all her life; you must excuse her for the present, but we hope to see great improvement."

"I am much afraid you will be disappointed, you dear old boy," said Emily, who had left her father and come up to Mr. Brandon, who was her particular favourite. "Keep your spirits up as well as you can; I am not going to be like your wonderful nephews and nieces at Ashfield. I never saw such ignorant children; they did not know how to make dirt pies, nor could they jump across the ditch, or get up by the trees to the top of the garden wall. Harriett and I had such a beautiful race round that garden, and they looked on so terrified."

"They could take the shine out of you at lessons, however," said Mr. Brandon, "and I won't take you there again to have another such spirited race till I hear satisfactory accounts of you from Miss Melville."

"Oh! the race was well enough, but the visit was very slow upon the whole, so I don't think I will break my heart if I never see the place again. Harriett may try to deserve it, but I will not take the trouble."

"I hate books," said Miss Harriett, "except picture books, and the fairy tales papa reads to us."

"You must not mind what they say, Miss Melville," said Mr. Phillips.

"I do not intend to do so. I hope to make them like their lessons by and by, and in the meantime they must learn them whether they like them or not."

"You would be astonished, Lily," said Mr. Phillips, addressing his wife, "to see what a clever, intelligent family of nephews and nieces Peggy has got. Miss Melville has been good enough to give them some extra instruction, and they certainly have profited by it; but even without that, Peggy has given them every advantage that she possibly could."

"Oh! Peggy had always very uppish notions," said Mrs. Phillips, "it will be a pity if she educates these children above their position."

"No one knows what position they may not take with such abilities and education in such a colony as Victoria. I may have to stand cap in hand to Tom Lowrie yet," said Mr. Phillips.

"You, Stanley!" said his wife; "you are so fond of saying absurd things."

"Don't you know the insecurity of runs?

And who knows but Tom may be Prime Minister or Commissioner of Public Lands or Public Works, or the chief engineer on a new railway, that may go right through my squatting rights? My dear Lily, I have a respect for incipient greatness, and when I stood among these young people, I felt they would be rising when I was perhaps falling."

"Were these your motives?" said Mr. Brandon, laughing. "I admired the young Lowries for what they were in themselves, and did not go so far into the future as you. I hope, Emily, that in time, Miss Melville will make you what Peggy calls keen of your learning, as well as her bairns."

"Did you like learning when you were a little girl?" asked Emily of Miss Melville.

"Very much, indeed."

"So mamma says, but then she did not have to learn very much. If I had not such a horrid lot of tasks, perhaps I might like some of them."

"But, my dear, you are so very ignorant, you have everything to learn now that you have come to England," said her mamma.

"But I hope not everything at once," said Jane.

"Not quite," said Mr. Phillips; "but perhaps too much so. You will see the list of the girls' studies to-morrow, and judge for yourself."

Mrs. Phillips was favourably impressed with Jane. She was well born and well educated, but she was plain looking. She had heard of her sudden and sad reverse of fortune, and felt disposed to take her up and patronise her. She had suffered from the want of a domestic manager and house counsellor; even the very good temper and great forbearance of her husband had given way at the small amount of comfort that could be obtained with such a lavish expenditure of money as his had been since they came to London; and he had spoken more sharply to her about her mismanagement than about anything else, so she felt that now he had a housekeeper of his own choosing, she should escape from all responsibility. Her manner to Jane was exceedingly kind, and Jane's hopes rose at her reception.

Mrs. Phillips always went to bed early, unless she was kept up by amusement and gaiety; her style of beauty was of the kind that suits best with plenty of sleep and few cares—so at ten o'clock she said she could sit up no longer, and left Mr. Phillips to explain all the duties expected of Miss Melville, so that she need not be disturbed by any inquiries in the morning.

Mr. Phillips did so with a clearness and precision that showed he had been often obliged to see to the disbursement of the money as well as the earning of it. He gave Jane the keys and the house-books, showed her what he thought was the sum he could spend on family expenses, and hoped that she would make it suffice.

"I wish you to be one of the family, Miss Melville; to visit and go to public places with Mrs. Phillips. I think we may dispense with all the masters for my little girls, except for music, and I hope that you will succeed in making them like both you and their lessons. I also hope, in a short time, to give you still more difficult and delicate work to do, and if you can be successful there, I will be most grateful to you. Mrs. Phillips has had a very imperfect education; she was born in the colonies, and was married when a mere child, and since her marriage she has had few opportunities of improving herself either by books or society. I think she feels her deficiencies; so if you could ingratiate yourself with her—she appears to be most favourably disposed towards you at first sight—and induce her to learn a little from you, you would add very greatly to our happiness and comfort, and I should be infinitely your debtor."

Mr. Phillips hesitated, and coloured a little while he made this suggestion. Jane said she would do what she could, and would be most happy to further his views in this and in every other way; but she felt not a little fearful at the idea of having to ingratiate herself with the woman she had been exhorted to take high ground with, and to teach, probably in the most elementary branches, the most lovely creature she had ever seen, the mistress of the house, and a person several years her senior. Still, no difficulty—no honour. She had wanted full employment, and here she was likely to get it.

Jane did not think she had naturally any great turn for children, but the little Phillipses had been so accustomed to have people pet and yield to them that they actually seemed to enjoy the repose and happiness of obeying, and obeying at once, their calm, grave governess, who never asked them to do anything unreasonable, but yet who always insisted on implicit acquiescence. They were indebted to her for the shortening and simplifying of all their lessons in the first place, and that called out a considerable amount of gratitude. She had a clear way of explaining things to them, and she had such large information on all subjects that she filled out the dry skeletons of geography and history which children are condemned to learn, and made them look living and real to them. Their father had taught the two elder girls to read, and to read well and fluently; but they had had no other lessons till they had come to London, and found their hitherto unexercised memories quite over-taxed by masters, who saw that the girls were quick, intelligent, and observant, with a great deal of practical knowledge quite unusual in England at their years, but absolutely devoid of all school acquirements. They found their lessons much more interesting to learn and much better retained when learned under Miss Melville than under their masters; and though they were not particularly fond of her, they were very happy with her.

Mrs. Phillips's only objection to Miss Melville was her Scotch accent; but, before six weeks had passed she had got over that, and thought being in London had softened it down very considerably, and she did not think the children were at all inclined to pick it up. She began to wonder if the governess would not give her some help or some hints, for she was going to visit her husband's relations in Derbyshire for a second time—her first visit had not been very long—and she hoped and wished that she might get on better than she had done before. Her husband had never found any fault with her in the bush of Australia; but her blunders before his father, brother, and sisters had distressed him so much that he had spoken to her many times rather sharply in private about them. Though she was a woman of a very indolent character, now that Jane managed all her housekeeping and her servants, wrote all her notes—that, however, was a saving of time to her husband rather than to herself—and relieved her a good deal from the worry of the children, she felt that she had some time on her hands, in spite of her going out a good deal to see and to be seen. She was no reader, and had no taste for needlework; but she had the gift of being able to sit in an easy chair thinking of nothing in particular, and doing nothing at all, but looking so beautiful that one might have fancied her thoughts to be of the most elevated description.

One day, while in this state of luxurious ease, she asked Jane how long she had been at school, and opened her eyes a hair-breadth or two wider when she was told of the education so peculiar, so protracted, that Mr. Hogarth had given to his nieces, and that even after she had left off regular study, Jane had never ceased to be learning something. Even now she was keeping up, partly for Tom Lowrie's sake, and partly for her own gratification, some of those branches of learning that were likely to be useful to him, and corresponding with him every week on those subjects.

Mrs. Phillips sighed, and said she had been married at sixteen, and had been very little at school all her life. She had always been moved from place to place when she was a girl, and there were no schools in the colony that were fit to teach young ladies then. Even now, it was the children's education that had been Mr. Phillips's great inducement to come to England, and she liked it very much herself, there was so much to see in London. But would Miss Melville think it very absurd if she were to propose to take lessons now? Jane said she would not think it at all absurd; she was sure Mrs. Phillips would find it very pleasant. But she was rather perplexed when the lady said that her chief ambition was to learn the pianoforte and how to make wax flowers. She had no particular taste for music, and no artistic taste at all; but music and wax flowers were expensive, fashionable, and showy accomplishments, and these Mrs. Phillips desired to acquire.

" These are things, unfortunately, that I cannot give you any assistance with," said Jane, recovering her presence of mind, " and perhaps you would not like to have masters and mistresses coming in for yourself. Any other branch of study we could go on with together, and that would be pleasanter. Music demands so very much time if you wish to make rapid progress."

"Emily only practises an hour and Harriett half an hour a day now, and though their master wished them to practise twice as long, they seem to get on much better since you said they should not be so long at the piano."

"Because it is practising, not amusing themselves or dawdling, and because it is an hour and half an hour, neither more nor less, and not an uncertain time, which is left to the performer's pleasure. To make any progress with music after you are grown up, you must give three or four hours a day to its acquirement, and that you would find it difficult—almost impossible—to keep up. But, as I said before, music is a thing I am so ignorant of that I can give you no assistance and no advice on the subject."

"I would like your assistance," said Mrs. Phillips, "for the children do get on with you, and they say that you make their lessons an amusement."

" Should you not like to be with us while we we are at study, and see if you think you could derive any benefit from my method? Come into the schoolroom to-morrow with us ?"

Mrs. Phillips agreed to this, and thought the lessons were very pleasant. Sometimes Jane made the little girls repeat their lessons to their mamma, still exercising the supervision which made them feel they must be as careful as heretofore. The oral instruction which accompanied the lessons studied from the book, seemed to Mrs. Phillips as well as to the children, the most interesting part of it, and as the language was simplified for the comprehension of the little pupils, it was not at all too abstract for their mother. She declared herself delighted with the morning at school, and tried to persuade herself that she was only going there to see how her governess did her duty by her children. In this way, by sitting two hours every forenoon with Miss Melville, she contrived to pick up something, and though both her husband and Jane would have been glad if the studies had been prosecuted a little further, they were very much pleased with so much improvement.

The idea of learning music still haunted Mrs. Phillips, and she obtained her husband's consent to her having lessons from Emily's master; but her progress was so slow that she tired of it in a month, and blamed her teacher for his stupid dry way of setting her to work. If Miss Melville had only understood music, she knew she would have got on ever so much better, for she had such a knack of teaching people. On the whole, Jane was satisfied with her situation, and with the manner in which she filled it, and when Mr. Phillips paid her her first quarter's salary, he expressed himself in the highest degree satisfied with everything she had done. If she could only have felt that Elsie was well and happy, she would have been perfectly happy herself, but the letters from Edinburgh were not at all cheerful. Elsie's account of herself, and Francis's accounts of her, were unsatisfactory, and even Peggy had written a few lines recently to say that she was uneasy about her, and did not think the situation at Mrs. Dunn's agreed with Miss Elsie at all.

It was still months before she could hope to go to Edinburgh to see her sister; but she wrote, urging her to give up her employment, and to take as much open-air exercise as possible, and also to take medical advice on the subject; but Elsie did not agree to this. . The family plans were all laid for a visit to Derbyshire, and Mr. Brandon, who seemed always to be on the move, when his old neighbours were leaving London, seeing Jane's distress about her sister, ventured on a good-natured suggestion in her behalf.

"I think you might go up now and see Peggy before you go to Derbyshire; you know she is anxious to see Emily and the other children. I could go with you. I wish so much to see the meeting between them."

"We cannot go to Scotland so early in the season. Autumn is the time when it is pleasant to travel in the north."

"But then I cannot be a witness to Peggy's delight, for if you delay so long I will have to be off to Melbourne before that time. I thought if you went now you might leave Miss Melville with her sister while you pay your visit. You do not mean to take her there, and the servants here will, I suppose, be put on board wages during your absence, so that she need not remain in London."

"We hope and expect that Miss Melville will accompany us to Derbyshire, that the children may go on with their lessons, and not get into as much mischief as they did on their last visit," said Mr. Phillips.

"I am sure their aunts made great complaints of them," said Mrs. Phillips, "and I do not wish to give room for so much complaint again. I hope Miss Melville will come with us."

"I would have escorted Miss Melville to Edinburgh before I went to Ashfield, for I must see that worthy Peggy again before I leave England, and visit my Edinburgh relatives again, too, and my time is getting short," said Mr. Brandon; "but if you cannot spare her, I cannot do anything but go to see her sister, and report myself on her appearance; perhaps your letters are duller than the reality."

"Did you not tell me your sister was a milliner, Miss Melville? What a sad thing. I am sure you are such a treasure to us that I wish some other family would take your sister," said Mrs. Phillips.

"She thinks millinery preferable to idleness; but the long hours, and the cold rooms, and the solitary life are too hard upon her."

"It must be dull for her to have no other society but that of our good Peggy and her bairns after a long day's work. Don't you think, Lily, that it would be a pleasant change for her to come and spend a few weeks with us after we return to London, as her sister cannot yet go to her?" said Mr. Phillips.

The idea of befriending Jane's sister in this way was not disagreeable to Mrs. Phillips. The invitation was given, and joyfully accepted. Mr. Brandon would delay his visit to the north till it was about the time for Elsie to come down, and would take care of her on the way.

Jane felt happy in this new proof of the kind feeling of the family towards her, and accompanied them to Derbyshire with a lighter heart.

Mr. Phillips's father was a medical man, with an excellent country practice, intelligent, chatty, and hospitable. He had married a Miss Stanley, who was not only of very good birth, but who had a considerable fortune, which was settled on her children. Her eldest son's portion of it had been the nucleus of the handsome fortune he had realised in Victoria. The old gentleman had been long a widower, and his two unmarried daughters lived with him, and kept his house, while his younger son had been brought up to assist his father in his profession, and eventually to succeed to the practice, but he, seeing how well his brother Stanley had got on, had a great hankering after an unlimited sheep-run in Australia.

The Misses Phillips were not young, but they were well dressed, well mannered, and good looking. There was a happy, prosperous, confident air about both of the sisters, and especially about the younger of the two. They were the darlings of their father, the first in their own set of acquaintances, a great deal taken notice of, on account both of their mother's social position and their father's professional talent, by county families; successful in domestic management, successful in society, of good understanding, and well educated, the Misses Phillips were looked up to very much, and felt that they deserved to be so. They were much disappointed in their brother's wife; from his letters, and the likenesses he had sent home, they were prepared for a romantic and interesting, as well as beautiful woman, but her want of education and of understanding, which they soon discovered on personal acquaintance, was most mortifying to ladies who thought they possessed both in a high degree, and they were quite distressed at having to introduce her into society. The husband saw and felt their coldness towards his wife, while Mrs. Phillips filled his ears with complaints of their uppishness, and their disagreeable ways.

Mr. Phillips had been so proud and so fond of his sisters, and had talked so much to her about their beauty, their cleverness, and their goodness, that she thought she too had a right to be disappointed. Their beauty had diminished during his fourteen years' absence in Australia; their cleverness only made her uncomfortable; and their goodness did not seem to extend to her. What right had a couple of ordinary-looking old maids to look down on her, a married woman of so many years' standing, so much younger and handsomer? She liked Jane Melville far better than either of her sisters-in-law, for, with more real mental superiority, there was an inferiority in position that set her at her ease.

Mr. Phillips was a little disappointed with his sisters, though he would scarcely own it to himself. The blooming girls of twenty-one and seventeen whom he had left were somewhat faded in the course of the many years' absence; and the very different lives that they had led made them take different views of most subjects. Their opinions had hardened separately, and when they met again they did not harmonize as they had done. His sisters were more aristocratic in all their tastes and feelings than the Australian squatter; they had scarcely mixed at all with children, and had no patience with his wild bush children, whose frankness and audacity were so terribly embarrassing; and they had shown their disappointment at his *mésalliance* very decidedly.

But on this occasion things went on much better; both Mrs. Phillips and the children were decidedly improved, and the sisters-in-law gave Miss Melville the credit of it, and liked her accordingly.

Miss Melville was presentable anywhere, though she was only a governess. The tale which Mr. Phillips told of her reverse of fortune interested them all, particularly the old gentleman.

He had met with Jane's uncle when he had been studying in Paris, who was then only a younger son, and had been just released from the strict discipline of a Scotch puritanical home, and not being ambitious of filling the subordinate office of "Jock, the laird's brother," wished to learn a profession, and thought he might try medicine as well as anything else. He was then clever, idle, and extravagant, but a great favourite with everybody. Jane questioned Dr. Phillips about the date of this acquaintance, but it had occurred before the supposed time of Francis's birth, so that he could throw no light on that question. Still she wrote to Francis on the subject, though she had thought his letters lately had been colder than before, and feared that his friendship for her was not so deeply seated as hers for him. Willing to show that her feelings towards him were unchanged, she entered into the same minute description of the family she was at present living with as she had done of the pupils, and the employers, and the visitors in London. She was at this time more interested in Dr. Phillips and his younger son Vivian than in any of the ladies of the family, and felt particularly puzzled to explain the desire of the latter to leave the country and his profession, when he had talents quite sufficient to make a good figure, for such a life as Mr. Brandon's had been in the Australian bush. He was the most scientific man whom Jane had met with in society; and, as he met with very little sympathy from either of his sisters in his chemical experiments or his geological researches, he appreciated her intelligent and inquiring turn of mind. There were many things he could throw light on which would be of service to Tom Lowrie, and were mentioned in her letters to him. Young Dr. Vivian Phillips had submitted to a great deal of the inevitable spoiling which an only brother at home receives. Georgiana was very strongly attached to him; and though Harriett had always said that she preferred Stanley, yet, when he came back, with his uncongenial wife and large family of young children to engross nine-tenths of his heart, her partiality for him seemed to fade away, and she felt that Vivian was far better than the other—at least, more clever and more English in his ideas; but Stanley was more liberal, and had a better temper. Vivian had fits of bad temper which no one could conquer, and his sisters found it was the only plan to let him alone.

Vivian would never think of falling in love with his brother's governess—he knew his own position too well for that: so that his sisters had no fear of his being in any danger when Jane joined him in his experiments in the laboratory, or went out with him and the children geologising. And they were perfectly right in that surmise. He liked Jane because he felt her to be a perfectly safe person—just a little more interesting than a companion of his own sex, and one to place rather more confidence in, for she had more sympathy and more enthusiasm; but she had excellent sense, and did not appear to be at all impressible.

Jane described the beautiful country walks she took, which she was sure Francis or Elsie would appreciate far better than she could do. She contrasted the activity and full life of the gentlemen of the house with the languid idleness of Mrs. Phillips and the busy idleness of her sisters-in-law, and thought it very unjust that all the work of the world should be done by the one sex and so little left for the other. She had thought the Misses Phillips superior to the Swinton young ladies at first; but on closer acquaintance, she found it quite as difficult to grow intimate with them. She thought she would prefer the High Church, and almost Puseyite, tendencies of the English women to the narrow and gloomy views of her Scotch neighbours; but her independent turn of mind, her eager love of inquiry and her thirst for truth, were as much cramped by the one as the other.

An enormous part of the Misses Phillips' lives was occupied in visiting and receiving visitors. Their superintendence of their father's household was very different from what had been expected from Jane and Elsie at Cross Hall. They had old and faithful servants, who knew their work and did it, and rarely troubled their mistresses for orders. They did not take the same interest or trouble about the poor which the Misses Melville had done. If Dr. Phillips mentioned any case of distress, the cook was directed to send broth, or wine, or they might even give a little money; but there was no personal inconvenience suffered or sacrifice made for the relief of want or the comforting of sorrow. The charity was given with the smallest amount of sympathy, and accepted with the smallest amount of gratitude.

In public matters, in social progress, in sanitary reforms, all the gentlemen took a lively interest; but the ladies considered these things quite out of their own line. There was this difference, however, between the sisters, that Georgiana (the eldest) could make any sacrifice cheerfully for any member of her own family, but Harriett was disinclined to make any, even for them. It is not to be supposed that the world in general saw all these traits as Jane, in her peculiar circumstances, and with her observant powers, had so much opportunity of doing. They were considered to be very superior and very amiable young ladies, and Mr. Brandon had been rather surprised at himself for not fixing his affections on Harriett, who, as the favourite sister of his dearest friend, would be suitable in every respect, and who appeared to have all the qualifications to make a good wife.

CHAPTER III.

ELSIE'S SITUATION.

It was not mere fancy on Jane's part that Elsie was ill and unhappy. She had magnanimously made up her mind to go to work with industry and spirit, and Mrs. Dunn was perfectly satisfied with her. But she missed Jane's society far more than her sister could miss hers. Jane was constantly employed in occupations that demanded intelligence and thought. She had access to books; she went to theatres and places of public amusement even more than she cared for; she had the society of Mr. Phillips constantly, and that of Mr. Brandon and several other Australians, who were either retired on a competency or home on a visit, very frequently, and she certainly thought them generally pleasant and intelligent, and more agreeable company than the provincial people in and about Swinton. Their frank acknowledgment of the early struggles which they had had with fortune, the hearty manner in which they enjoyed the prosperity they had earned, and their kindly feeling towards each other, made Jane have a favourable impression of colonial people. Mr. Phillips had become acquainted with several people from other colonies than Victoria, partly on board ship, and partly from other introductions. A curious and ignorant suspicion that somehow all Australians have a sort of convict origin, made it more difficult at that time for them than for retired Indians to get into general society. There was no nice distinction drawn between the different colonies; between New South Wales and Victoria, or South Australia and Tasmania in those days—a slight savour of Botany Bay was supposed to hang about them all. But they formed a pleasant little clique of their own, less exclusive than most cliques, and generally disposed to hold up each one his own particular colony as preferable to the others. They might contrast it unfavourably with Britain, but as compared with the other colonies, it ought to bear the palm.

Elsie felt the want of this intelligence and this variety of character that Jane described to her so minutely in her frequent letters, and regretted that she could write nothing interesting in return. When she came home after a long day's work, she thought she ought to try to keep up a little of her sister's discipline with the Lowries, and went over their lessons with them.

Tom used to bring to her the most puzzling questions, which she thought she ought to be able to answer, and made great efforts to do so; but instead of the intellectual work refreshing her after the sedentary needlework, she felt all the more exhausted by it. As for her poetry, she appeared to be unable to write a line, and though she sometimes could read an old book, she seemed quite unfit to pay attention to anything new.

She missed the long walk she had daily taken in Jane's pleasant company. It was not far from Peggy's house to Mrs. Dunn's place of business, and it was a very monotonous walk. The white regular houses, all of one size and height, with their thousands of windows exactly on the same model, seemed always staring her out of countenance, and made her feel depressed even in the early morning. She felt the keen piercing east winds of an Edinburgh spring as she had never done at Cross Hall, where they were sheltered from them by a beautiful plantation of trees; and the continued poor living and the hurried meals began to tell upon a constitution naturally much less robust than Jane's, so that she began to look pale and thin, and coughed a good deal, and lost her appetite.

With all these drawbacks she improved so much in taste and skill that Mrs. Dunn raised her wages—or salary, as she genteelly called it—and put her at the head of the department in which she so much excelled, so that she could not bear to give up her contribution to the little fund that Jane was putting into the Savings Bank.

Miss Rennie had persuaded her mamma to try Mrs. Dunn's establishment, and had told that lady that it was all on Miss Elsie Melville's account, so she often saw her and Laura Wilson there, and made bonnets for both of them with her own hands; and the Chalmerses and Jardines had also come to see how Elsie got on, and other people from the neighbourhood of Swinton. Elsie would rather not have had dealings with so many old acquaintances, but Mrs. Dunn thought it was a just reward for her kindness that she had this increase of custom.

One day, about four months after she had been engaged in this business, Miss Rennie and Miss Wilson came in with most important-looking faces. While Miss Wilson was busied turning over the fashion-books, her friend whispered to Elsie:

"It is really a case; Laura is engaged to Mr. Dalzell, your old friend and neighbour, and she is going to give one of her wedding orders here. Mrs. Dunn should be greatly obliged to you, for we never would have come to the house but for you. But this marriage amuses me a good deal. I'm sure your sister was fifty times too good for him, and Laura and he will just suit each other. He is very much attached to her fortune, and she will have it settled upon herself; at least, papa will see that is done as tightly as she could wish, and Laura has a sharp eye to number one, I can assure you. She is quite delighted at the idea of being married at eighteen, to such a handsome man, of such a good family. Mrs. Dalzell has been to see us, and been so gracious. After all, what better luck could she look for than to be married for her money? with such a temper as she has, too. He certainly is handsome; but for my part, I would rather have a man who is downright ugly than one who grins and bows like William Dalzell. I will be quite glad when this affair is over. Lovers are very tiresome when one does not quite believe in the love."

"Well, Laura dear, have you made up your mind about the dresses?" continued Miss Rennie, in a louder voice.

"You had better go to Mademoiselle Defour about the dresses," said Elsie. "I must keep to my own department."

"Oh, Laura wants your taste to help us to decide; you know better what suits than mademoiselle," said Miss Rennie.

"But I am going to be busy here," said Elsie, who never felt much disposed to wait on Miss Wilson, and at this time less than ever; and she turned to an elderly lady, of a very pleasing countenance, who, with a pretty girl of thirteen, entered the showroom at that moment.

"Oh, Miss Thomson," said Miss Rennie, shaking hands with the new comer, "how do you do? Are you in Edinburgh just now? You must come to see mamma; she will be so disappointed if you leave her out. Have you come to hear Dr. B——? He preaches for the last time in Edinburgh on Sunday."

"I am to be in Edinburgh for a few days," said Thomson, " and will certainly call on your mother."

" This is one of your nieces, I suppose?" said Miss Rennie.

" Yes, this is Grace Forrester, my youngest niece, who has been doing so well at school, and been such a good girl altogether, that I must needs give her a new frock for a party she is invited to next week, and get it fashionably made, too, no doubt."

" This is not the dressmaking-room—Miss Melville is the milliner. We must go to the next room for Grace's frock," said Miss Rennie.

" But I am in want of a new cap and bonnet for myself, and I must teach Grace that old people must be served first, and that young folks must wait with patience," said Miss Thomson, looking very kindly on the girl. " Miss Melville can take my order, I suppose? You are the sister of the young lady who called on me some time ago?"

" Yes, ma'am," said Elsie.

" I can see a very slight likeness. I was very glad to hear such good accounts of your sister getting a situation with some rich colonial people in London; and I hear, too, that you are a remarkably good hand in your own line, so I have come to ask you to make me a cap and a bonnet that will keep on my head; and that is what I cannot get the fashionable milliner I have employed so long to make me this year back."

"I can make to please Peggy Walker," said Elsie, smiling; "but you will wish for more style—a compromise between fashion and comfort."

"With a decided leaning towards comfort," said Miss Thomson. "Are you still living with Peggy Walker? An admirable woman she is, and one whom I have the greatest respect for; but does she take good care of you? You look thin and ill."

"I am not very well, but Peggy is everything that is kind and careful. I have missed my sister, sadly. I hope, however, to see her soon, for Mrs. Phillips has been so good as to ask me to spend a few weeks in London, and Mrs. Dunn is going to spare me."

"Well, I am glad to hear it," said Miss Thomson, "for it seems to me you want a change and a rest. Your cousin is making great alterations at Cross Hall.

"Alterations for the better," said Elsie. "He told us about them."

"Well, I'm not clear about the allotments; but the cottages I do most highly approve of, and I am coming upon my landlord to build me eight or nine, after the same plan, as near as may be. The Allendale cot-houses are very old, and I will never consent to have my work-people as badly lodged as they have been. If I asked for five hundred pounds to add to the farm-house, I would get it at once, for I am a good tenant; but my landlord demurred at such an expenditure for cot-houses. I think I will carry my point, however."

"You know," said Miss Rennie to Miss Thomson, "of the new neighbour you are likely to get at Moss Tower? Mamma wants to have a talk with you about Laura's marriage, as you know the Dalzells."

"Oh, yes, certainly, I'll call on your mother. I don't forget any of my cousins, though they are a few times removed. But, dear me, Eliza, that poor girl Melville looks ill; the brae she has had to climb has been owre stey for her. I must look in on Peggy Walker, and hear what she says about her," said Miss Thomson, as they moved into mademoiselle's department and gave orders about Grace's frock, while Miss Wilson looked over dresses, made and unmade, and received hints and suggestions from any quarter she could.

Elsie wished that she could be out of the establishment before Miss Wilson's wedding order came to it; so she was very glad when, after a longer day than usual, in which she had exercised her utmost skill for Miss Thomson's behoof, and certainly pleased herself with her work, she returned home and found Mr. Brandon sitting talking in his usual cheerful way to Peggy and the old man.

Dr. Phillips had wished that Elsie should join her sister before she left Derbyshire, and spend a week or so at his house, for he had been so delighted with Jane that he had a desire to become acquainted with Elsie also; so that Mr. Brandon had come sooner than he had intended, and proposed an early departure. Elsie looked so glad, so very glad to see him; expressed herself so grateful to him for all the trouble he was taking for her; and after asking for Jane and the Phillipses, began to inquire about his own relations, and how he had enjoyed his visit to Ashfield, with so much interest, that Mr. Brandon thought her manner more pleasant than ever.

CHAPTER IV.

ELSIE REFUSES AN EXCELLENT OFFER.

MR. BRANDON had come home with the intention of marrying, and had flirted a good deal during the six or eight months of his stay in England, but he had seen so many young ladies that one had driven another out of his head. He thought he might have fallen in love with Miss Harriett Phillips, who, though not very young, would in all other respects be very suitable, and who, he had no doubt, would accept him; but still he could not manage to cultivate an attachment strong enough to warrant such a desperate step as a proposal. Ever since he had seen Elsie Melville at Mrs. Rennie's party, her face and form, and her pleasant voice with its Scotch accent, recurred more frequently in his thoughts than those of any woman he had seen. Her elegance, her gentleness, her sprightliness, had struck him at sight, and her forlorn condition was very interesting. Her poetical talents, of which he had heard from Peggy, impressed him a good deal, and the manner in which she had taken so industriously to the only means of earning a livelihood open to her, though one which was so far beneath her, had certainly called forth his respect.

The sight of Elsie again, though in diminished beauty, revived all those sentiments of compassion and protection that he had felt for her from first hearing of her misfortunes. Yes, he would marry her, and then she would grow rosy and happy; and he would get her poems published at his own expense, and have such a splendid copy for herself to lay on her drawing-room table—for she should have a drawing-room at Barragong, and every comfort, and even luxury, that Victoria in those days could afford. He never would be ashamed to take Elsie to see any of his friends or relatives, for she was a gentlewoman born and bred. As for her being a milliner for the present, it was only so much the more to be proud of.

These thoughts lay in Brandon's mind, and strengthened every day of his short stay in Edinburgh; his strong-minded cousins thought Walter Brandon was more contemptible than ever, for he did not seem to have an idea in his head; whereas it was because he had one idea very strongly in his head and heart that he was so disinclined for argument or discussion. Peggy, who perceived Brandon's evident admiration, again regretted her own burst of confidence in her autobiographical sketch, but thought that now Miss Elsie was so downcast and so miserable, that she would never think of refusing so excellent an offer as her old master could make. She began to praise Mr. Brandon—to whose character, however, she never did full justice, from not understanding many of its best points. She liked Mr. Phillips much better, who was graver. Her Scotch phlegmatic temperament could not appreciate the fine spirit and unvarying good humour of Brandon, and his random way of talking she thought flighty and frivolous. But yet she could, and did, praise him for his kindness of heart and his want of selfishness, which he had shown on many occasions, great and small, at Barragong. These panegyrics were bestowed with discretion, not being told to Elsie herself, but brought out incidentally in conversation with grandfather, who thought highly of Brandon, and never ceased to extol his politeness.

Elsie and Brandon had a railway carriage to themselves for a considerable part of the way; and he thought he never could have a better opportunity of declaring himself; so, with rather less stammering and hesitation than is usual on such occasions—for he had not the least doubt of a favourable answer—he made Elsie understand that he loved her, and asked for her love in return.

"No, no—oh, no!" said Elsie, covering her face with her hands.

"Why 'No,' Miss Alice? 'Yes' sounds a great deal prettier. I'll take such good care of you, and I am sure you will like Australia. Peggy has not given you a very dismal account of Barragong, and I have had it very much improved since her time, and I will have a great deal more done to it; and before we go I will have your book printed——"

"My book," said Elsie; "what book?"

"Your poems—I know they are beautiful—Peggy told me about them; and we will have them brought out in the very best style, and I will be so proud to think what a genius I have got for my own darling."

Elsie sighed deeply; tried to speak, but could not. It was a good sign, Mr. Brandon thought—a sigh was ten times more encouraging than a smile. He knew he had hit upon the right thing when he had spoken of her poems; it was wonderful how discerning love had made him.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Brandon," said she with difficulty, scarcely daring to raise her eyes to the level of his waistcoat; "I am no genius, and my poems are not worth printing—poor, crude, empty productions. I believe I can make caps and bonnets, but that is all that I can do."

"That is only your opinion of yourself. But with my will, you shall make no more frippery of the kind. It is quite beneath you."

"It is not beneath me to earn an honest livelihood."

"No; but it was cruel to make you have to do it. I have been so sorry for you all these months, when Miss Melville told me how you were employed."

"Do not say anything more about your pity for me; it pains me."

"It is not pity; it is love," said he, stoutly.

"Love born of pity, that will die when—I mean if—but it cannot be; I never can be your wife—the most unsuitable, the most wrong thing that I could do. Do not speak any more about it."

Elsie's real distress convinced Mr. Brandon of her sincerity, but it set him on a wrong scent.

There must be a rival; no doubt she must love some one else, or she would have given him a hearing. It was not possible that a girl would prefer poverty, solitude, and a position like that which she held at Mrs. Dunn's, to marriage with a good-looking, good-tempered fellow like himself, who would deny her nothing, and who intended to be the kindest husband in the world —if her heart was disengaged. Now poor Elsie was as heart-whole as a girl could be, but her manner of refusing made him think of a number of little signs which looked as if she were the victim of a hopeless attachment. Her sadness, her poetry, her little sighs, her diffidence, her pining away, were all due to the shameful conduct of one who in happier days had sought her hand, and had deserted her when fortune changed. His pity for her increased, but his love did not. If she had the bad taste to prefer a sad memory to a living lover, she might do so. He did not care to inquire as to the particulars of her unhappy love, even if he had thought it honourable to do so. The truth is, that Mr.

Brandon did not love Elsie very much, though he thought he did so when he asked her. If she had said yes—if she had looked at him with grateful eyes, and told him that she would try to do her best to make him happy, his love would have become real, and would have surprised both himself and her by its strength and its steadiness. But he had never dreamed of such a thing as a refusal, and he had hastened his proposal, not from any feeling of insecurity, but from a desire to make Elsie very happy, and to do it as soon as possible.

But he had been refused—positively refused. Elsie might have said more of the obligation to him—might have been more grateful for the compliment which he had paid to her—Walter Brandon thought it would have been graceful to do so; but she said nothing of the kind. She sat in a rigid, painful silence till they reached the next station, where other passengers joined them, and put an end to a *tête-à-tête* which was rather awkward for both parties. She felt that she had given pain and mortification to a man who had meant well by her, and she did not dare to open her lips in consolation or extenuation. She could not trust herself to speak; she would not venture to renew any solicitation. Forlorn and humbled as she was, she felt that she was in the greatest danger; that it was a tremendous bribe that was offered to her. She had Peggy's story ringing in her ears, and thought of Peggy's insight and Peggy's courage. The weak and facile Mr. Brandon was apt to fall in love, or to fancy that he did so, with any woman he came in much contact with, and she was as unsuitable for him, even more unsuitable, than Peggy was. The discipline of the last ten months had been too severe for her; it had crushed her spirit, and injured her health. She felt alarmed about her cough, and recently had been thinking more of the blessedness of an early death than the happiness of an early marriage. She felt herself to be sickly, low-spirited, wanting in energy, no fit companion for any colonist, and especially unfit to be the wife of a man of so little force of character.

His offer appeared to her to be rash and imprudent. What did he know of her to warrant him in risking his life's happiness in such a way? But yet, though it was foolish in him to ask her, and though it would have been very wrong in her to accept of him, she was grateful, *so* grateful. How little Walter Brandon could guess how grateful she felt, when, after their journey was over, he took her cold, trembling hand, and placed her in the carriage that was to take them to Dr. Phillips's.

"You seem afraid of me, Miss Alice," said he. "Do not think that I will say another word on the subject, if it is painful to you. I know better than to persecute a woman with my addresses, if I see she does not like them. But do you *really* not like them?"

"No, I do not," said Elsie, abruptly. "You will see hundreds of other women who would suit you far better than I could do."

"If you would only love me, I should be quite satisfied with your suiting me—but if you cannot, there need be no more said about it."

Jane was engaged with her pupils when her sister arrived, and Mrs. Phillips, who had not been very regular in her attendance at school lately, stayed in the room this morning in order to see and remark upon Miss Melville's pretty sister. She could see little beauty in the sad face, with the weary look about the eyes, and the lines round the mouth, that had been the result of Elsie's real experience of life. The figure, Mrs. Phillips confessed to her husband and to Mr. Brandon, was rather good, but wanted development; it was too much of the whipping-post order. The Misses Phillips said they really thought Jane the better looking of the two girls, for she had such a beautiful expression; while Mr. Phillips said that Elsie had fallen off sadly since he saw her in Edinburgh at the new year. She had struck him then as being very pretty, but he did not think so now, and, of course, in every other respect but personal appearance she could not be compared with her sister. Dr. Phillips said he must have her examined about her cough, for it should not be trifled with. He hoped that it had not been too long neglected. All these remarks, coming immediately after his refusal by the object of them, made Brandon somewhat reconciled to the circumstance, though if he had had a kinder answer, they would have made no difference in his feelings towards Elsie, but would probably have made him love her all the more.

When Harriett Phillips spoke in warm praise of Miss Melville's excellent understanding, and her fine, open, intelligent, expression of countenance, he thought he never saw her own countenance look so open or so attractive. He felt disposed to be consoled, and he was very sure that she was quite willing to console him.

Jane saw much amiss with her darling sister at the first glance, but hoped that the change, and Dr. Phillips's advice, which he had said would be at her service, and her own society, would benefit Elsie greatly.

Elsie did not muster courage to tell Jane of the incident of the railway journey till they had retired for the night.

"You know I could not answer otherwise, Jane; I did not love him; do not be angry with me," said Elsie, apologetically.

"Angry with you, my dear child! No, I honour you," said Jane.

"You see, Jane, I have been so unhappy, so ill, and so low-spirited, that I could easily have snatched at an escape from this dreary life, and said I would marry him; but he would have been so disappointed when he came to know me."

"You do not love him now, Elsie, but could you not have learned to love him? It is not to be supposed that a girl has a ready-made attachment to be given to the first man who sees fit to ask her; she must take a little time."

"But, Jane, though he has been very kind to us, you know—you remember Peggy, and what she said about him?"

Jane nodded assent.

"I know I have been rude about it. I ought to have said much that I felt, but when girls say such things they either give more pain afterwards, or get committed. Oh! Jane, tell me again that I have been right."

"Right? yes," said Jane, thoughtfully. "Perhaps you ought to have a man of more fixed principles, if he could be had. But Elsie, my darling, it is not who we ought to have in the world, but who will have us; reflect that you may never have such an offer, or, indeed, another offer of any kind, again. I do not mean to bias your judgment, my own dear sister. Only think—he has, as you say, been very kind. He is not faultless; but who is? As for Peggy's story, that was many years ago; and, so far as I can judge from our friends here, he bears an excellent character. We should not condemn a man for life on account of something wrong done, or, as in this case, only purposed, when very young, and in circumstances of temptation which you and I, perhaps, can scarcely appreciate. He took Peggy's first answer in a right spirit, and you can see how he respects her. All I have seen of him since I came to London, has disposed me to think favourably of him. His temper is the finest in the world, I think."

"Finer than Francis'?" said Elsie, who knew her sister's very great regard for her cousin, and never fancied she could think any man his superior in any point.

"Yes, sunnier than Francis'."

"But he is not half so clever or so cultivated," remonstrated Elsie.

"His cleverness lies in a different direction."

"I think him inferior to Francis in every way," said Elsie, "and that weighed with me in giving my answer. You should think your husband the very best person you ever saw."

"Perhaps when he is your husband you may, but I fancy that a girl who has a good father and brothers, does not at once give a man this preference when he asks for her hand. As I said before, he is not faultless, but would not life with him be preferable to life as it is for you now?"

"Don't, Jane; don't side with my cowardly self. To marry him, not loving him, as he perhaps deserves to be loved—not honouring him as I know I should honour my husband—but merely because I am miserable—how cruel to him, how base in myself! I know, besides, that he only pities me. Oh! Jane, if it were only life with you I could bear it better, but I am so weary of that workroom at Mrs. Dunn's, and of seeing people there whom I used to know, and getting a pitying sort of recognition from them. The very girls in the workroom pity me, and Peggy pities me, and even the children and their grandfather pity me. Oh! Jane, Jane, I am tired, tired to death of all this pity. Nobody ever thought of pitying you in your hardest times; you could hold up your head, and mine seems as if I never could raise it more. It must have been only pity in Mr. Brandon's case—what did he know of me to make him love me?"

"Have you forgotten that you are a very sweet, charming girl, Elsie—that your eyes are both bright and true—that your voice is pleasant, both in itself, and for the very pleasant things you can say? My darling, you must not lose all pride in yourself in this way. I wish half the offers of marriage that are made were founded on as much respect as Mr. Brandon felt for you. Though he talked slightingly of your work at Mrs. Dunn's, do not fancy but that he honours you for doing it. Besides, though he is not very literary, he may admire your talents. He meant to please you by speaking about your poems."

"If he thinks I could be brilliant in society, or do him any credit in that way, he would be sure to be disappointed, and what a terrible thing it must be to disappoint a husband! It is not so much his deficiencies as my own, that weigh upon me. And, besides, Jane, I am not well; I really think I am going into a consumption—the sooner the better, if it were not for you, my dearest—and to marry any one with such a conviction, would be positively wicked."

"Oh, you are not going into a consumption, Elsie, I hope and believe," said Jane, as cheerfully as she could. "Your apprehension of such a thing shows that you are in no danger. You will see Dr. Phillips to-morrow morning, and get something to set you to rights. I am glad you are joining us here, for the sake of his advice. I like him so very much, and I think him clever—perhaps not naturally so acute as Dr. Vivian, but he has had a large practice so long, and so little wedded to routine, and so willing to accept of any new light that can be thrown on medicine, that his greater experience more than counterbalances his son's greater talent. And he is cheerful, too; the sound of his voice, and even of his step, is like a cordial to the sick and the depressed, I think. I know it does me a great deal of good, and it must benefit you."

"You are very happy here; honoured, and useful, and well paid," said Elsie.

"Oh! yes, dear; I have a great deal to be thankful for, and in time we will be able to be together always. In the meantime your holiday must be enjoyed to the utmost."

So the sisters talked of their plans for the future, and of the routine of their past life, as cheerfully as they could, and tried to banish Mr. Brandon from their thoughts. Elsie was asleep first, and then Jane anxiously lay awake, weighing the probabilities about her health and her recovery, and also thinking with approval, but certainly with regret, of Elsie's conscientious refusal of so excellent an offer as she had that day received. Her own opinion of Mr. Brandon had risen since she had known him better, and she believed that Elsie would have suited him extremely well. She only hoped that he would not accept her sister's answer as final, at least, if Dr. Phillips pronounced favourably on the subject of her health.

CHAPTER V.

ELSIE ACCEPTS OF A NEW SITUATION.

When Dr. Phillips had asked Elsie a great number of questions on all sorts of subjects, that seemed but remotely connected with the cough that she was so alarmed about—had sounded her chest, and gone through the several forms of examination—

"Now," said she, "Doctor, tell me the truth; I am not at all afraid to hear it. I have no dread of death; indeed, I rather desire it than otherwise."

"I am sorry to hear it, my dear girl; for I do not see any chance of it. There is nothing organic the matter with you—nothing whatever —only a nervous affection that a little care will overcome. You have been overworked and underfed. You have been out of doors only in the early morning and the late evening, and have scarcely seen the sun for months. You have had a great deal on your spirits, and been exceedingly dull. You have missed your excellent sister, and I do not wonder at it. It would have been a miracle if you could have kept your health this unkindly spring, with all these drawbacks. But you have nothing whatever alarming in your case."

"My dear Miss Melville," continued he, turning to Jane, "I assure you that your sister only wants what she has come to England to obtain—change, cheerful society, sunshine, and generous diet—to restore her to perfect health."

Elsie gave one sigh at this verdict.

"Do not think me ungrateful, Dr. Phillips; I should be thankful to be restored to health; but life has been so hard for me lately, that I felt almost glad to think that, without any fault of my own, God was going to take me away, and that Jane would join me by and by, when her work was done. She is fit for the work she has got to do, and I appear to be so unfit for it. I suppose we ought to love life——"

"It is a sign that one is out of health when one does not," said Dr. Phillips. "Your depression of spirits is more physical than mental; but then it reacts upon your health You used to be cheerful before you left that place—what do you call it?—where my old friend Hogarth brought you up."

"Yes, quite cheerful," said Elsie; "but things have gone very differently with me since."

"Well, you must regain your old spirits, if possible; and in the meantime, get on your bonnet and have a little drive with me while Miss Melville is busy with her pupils. If you won't mind a few stoppages, we will have a pleasant round, through as pretty a part of the country as England can boast of."

Jane asked privately for Dr. Phillips's opinion, being sure that he gave Elsie his brightest view of her case.

"There is nothing positively wrong with her at present, Miss Melville; but she has got into such a low tone of health that she needs care. She must never return to such a life as she has had lately; she must have a lighter employment, more open air, and better food."

"It is so difficult," said Jane, "to get employment. I am sure there are a thousand chances against my finding such an excellent situation as I have with Mrs. Phillips."

"And a thousand chances against their meeting with such an excellent governess and housekeeper. The pleasure is mutual, I am sure. I must see what your sister is fit for, when she is a little stronger."

Both Elsie and Jane saw at once that Mr. Brandon was disposed to take Elsie's rejection as a final decision, and that he would have no difficulty in transferring his attentions, if not his affections to Miss Harriett Phillips. Elsie felt that she could not have been much admired or loved, when he could so soon attach himself to a woman so very different from herself. Here it certainly might be love without any mixture of pity. He made himself very agreeable, and Miss Harriett was not so much flattered as gratified. All his homage was received by her as her due; there were no quick flushes of pleasure or surprise at any little mark of kindness or attention; no disclaiming of any compliment which was paid her as exaggerated or undeserved; the smile of perfect self-complacency sat on her face, and gave ease to her every action and every speech. She never hesitated in giving her opinion; she never qualified or withdrew it when given. She knew herself to be perfectly well-informed and perfectly well-bred. She felt herself to be Mr. Brandon's superior in every point—in natural ability, in education, in acquired manner, in social position, and, of course, in moral character also, for she had no faith in the goodness of the other sex. She saw many of their faults, and guessed at many more, and she did not see or understand their virtues; and Brandon made no pretence to being particularly good, and spoke slightingly of her favourite clergyman, who was rather too High Church in his notions to please the latitudinarian ideas of an Australian bushman. Her connection with the county Stanleys gave her a prestige that Mr. Brandon never could have, for his family were only middle-class people, not at all intellectual or aristocratic. Her brother was astonished to see how much more Georgiana and Harriett spoke of their relations by the mother's side, who had never done anything for them, than those good uncles and aunts Phillipses, who had invited them for the holidays, and given them toys and books without number; but all his laughing at his sisters could not alter their views, and his own wife sided with the ladies, and was very proud of her husband's aristocratic name and relations, though she had none of her own.

Though in all these respects Harriett Phillips was so much Mr. Brandon's superior, she was disposed to accept of him when he asked her, as he was sure to do. It was so difficult for her to meet with her equal, either social, intellectual, or moral; and a husband, even though an Australian, began to be looked upon as a desirable thing at her time of life. And though Brandon was not fascinated by her, though he was not interested in her, though he felt no thrill in touching her hand, no exquisite delight in listening to her voice or her singing, he began to feel that this was to be his fate, and that the quiet, pale girl who had refused him would not make so suitable a wife for him as Harriett Phillips, after all.

He was somewhat astonished, however, when he heard from this last-named lady, about a week after Elsie Melville's arrival, that her sister-in-law had engaged her services as lady's-maid. A lady's-maid was what Mrs. Phillips had long desired to have, and now, when she saw Elsie's excellent taste, both in dressmaking and millinery, she thought that with a few lessons in hair-dressing she might suit her very nicely, and it would be quite a boon to the poor girl, whom Dr. Phillips had forbidden to return to her situation in Edinburgh. Mr. Phillips, though he thought that a lady's-maid was rather beyond his circumstances and his wife's sphere, hoped such good things from her associating constantly with two such women as Jane and Elsie Melville, that he readily gave his consent. Elsie as readily agreed to serve in this inferior capacity. The pleasure of being near her sister was not to be refused on account of being so far subordinated to her. She was deeply impressed with her own inferiority, and fell into her place at once.

Harriett Phillips could not help a slight sneer at her sister-in-law's assumption in this new step towards gentility; but as she was going to London with the family, she had no doubt that Elsie would be glad to be of service to her too, as she appeared to be very good-natured, and willing to oblige a family who had been so very kind to her sister and herself. There were so many things that were secured for Elsie by this arrangement which were imperatively necessary for her health, that Jane submitted to it as the best possible under the circumstances, though she feared that Mrs. Phillips would show to Elsie the caprice and bad temper which she dared not show to herself. And in this she was not mistaken; for Elsie was so yielding and so diffident, that her new mistress exercised a great deal of real tyranny over her, varied by fitful acts of liberality and kindness. Peggy Walker opened her eyes very wide when she heard of both the young ladies, whom she had been accustomed to look up to, being dependent in this way on Mrs. Phillips, whom she had always looked down upon; but she knew that the sisters were together, and that that was a happiness to both that outweighed many other drawbacks. She herself was very much engrossed with the care of grandfather, who, as well as Elsie, had felt the ungenial spring very trying, and who did not seem to rally as the season advanced; so she was thankful that Elsie was otherwise bestowed than in her house of sickness.

Dr. Phillips had the satisfaction of seeing a considerable improvement in Elsie before she left Derbyshire, and used to have her company in his morning drives to visit his patients, when her pleasant conversation and winning manner made him ere long prefer her to her graver and less pliant sister. He missed both the girls when they went to London, and even Dr. Vivian paid Jane the compliment of regretting her society a little for a week.

CHAPTER VI.

A LETTER FROM AUSTRALIA FOR FRANCIS, WHICH CAUSES SURPRISE IN AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER.

A FEW weeks after the return of Mr. Phillips with his family, his sister Harriett, and our friends Jane and Elsie to London, where the courtship, or rather dangling, of Mr. Brandon was going on in the same uninteresting manner, but with no apparent jar to prevent its leading to matrimony at last, Jane was surprised by the sight of her cousin Francis, who said he had come to the metropolis, chiefly for the purpose of seeing her.

" I called at Peggy Walker's, before I left Scotland;" said Francis, " but the family write to you so frequently that I suppose you know all the news. The old man is looking very ill, however; I was quite struck by the change in his appearance. I do not think that situation healthy; I feel very glad you and Elsie have both left it. How is Elsie getting on with Mrs. Phillips?"

"Tolerably—only tolerably. But her health is better—decidedly better."

"And you, Jane, you are looking much better than when I saw you in Edinburgh last."

"You have not written to me at such length about your cottages and your allotments as I expected, Francis. I suppose you are too busy to have time to write, but now you have come, we can talk over all these matters."

It had not been voluntarily, or without a great effort, that Francis had so much slackened his close correspondence with Jane; but her letters were so cheerful, she seemed so busy and hopeful, she saw so many people, and appeared to be so much appreciated by Mr. Phillips and by all his family, that he had no hope of her allowing him to make the sacrifice he longed to make, and he thought he must try to accustom himself to look on her as lost to him.

"I have been busy," said he, "but I do not attempt to excuse myself by such a reason. I have not given you answers at all worthy of your letters."

"I have always thought that it is considered the great art in a gentleman's letter that he should put a great deal of matter in few words, while a lady piques herself on making an excellent letter out of nothing. If your letters were shorter than mine, they were not, on that account, unsatisfactory," said Jane.

"Your observation of character and manners is so much more acute than mine, that you can see and hear nothing which you cannot photograph faithfully, and make an interesting picture of, and you seem to have interesting people to write about," said Francis.

"I do not think that if I had been at Cross Hall, and you in London, my letters would have been the longest. Our old neighbours were very uninteresting—do you not find them so?"

"All except Miss Thomson, whose acquaintance I have recently made, and who has enough of originality and goodness about her to give some salt to the district. She is much interested in both of you; especially in Elsie, whom she saw at Mrs. Dunn's, and got to make something for her, which has given the greatest satisfaction."

"I must tell this to Elsie," said Jane; "she needs a little praise, and it does her good."

"But I want first to consult you about a letter I received the day before I left home," said Francis. This was his excuse for exposing himself to Jane's influence again. The thing might have been done by letter, but he scarcely thought it could be so well done; so he had first seen Mr. McFarlane in Edinburgh, and then hastened to London to ask the advice of the dearest friend he had in the world on the subject of this ill-written and ill-expressed letter.

It ran as follows:

"Melbourne, 20th April, 185—.

"MY DEAR SON FRANK,

"I HAVE heard that you are come into the property at last. I knew he could not keep it from you, though he wanted to, for you was the hair, and had the rights to get it. I hope you will not forget a mother that has always remembered you, though I was forced to part from you when you was very little, so you will scarce know my face again. I would not stand in your light, and it has turned out all right for you.

"I had an allowance of a hundred and fifty pounds a year from him as long as he lived, and when it stopped I made some inquiry, and found that you had got Cross Hall and all that he had. I think that I should have got some notise of his being dead, but I am quite used to being neglected. I hope you will not let me be any the poorer, but the contrary, for I have been a better mother to you than many a one as makes more fuss. It was him as would not let me keep you, and drove me away to Australia.

I would come to see you now that he is out of the way, but I cannot afford the expense. If I had not met with such ungrateful conduct from them as ought to have provided for me, I might have been rich enuf; but it is a bad world, and the longer I live, I see that it gets worse and worse. It will be for your advantage to keep friendly with me, and at any rate you will do as much as your father did, which was little enuf, God knows. But I expect as the baby that I loved so dear will be a good kind son to me now you have come into the property.

"Address to Mrs. Peck, care of Henry Talbot, Esq., solicitor, —— Street, Melbourne. I was not allowed to keep my own name or to take his, and so everybody knows me by the name of Mrs. Peck, but I am really and truly your afexionate mother,

"ELIZABETH HOGARTH."

"P.S. Send me an answer and a remittance by the first mail. I am very badly off and need money."

Jane read this letter twice over, and looked at the address and the postmark carefully.

"What do you think of it?" said he, anxiously.

"Have you asked Mr. McFarlane if he thinks this letter genuine?"

"He never saw any of Elizabeth Hogarth's writing. Any communication which my father received from her, he must have destroyed at once."

"Did he know anything of the 150*l.* a year?"

"He thought it probable some money was paid to keep her at a distance, but did not know anything as to how much it was, or when it was sent."

"Is there any trace in the banking transactions of my uncle of such a payment being remitted regularly to Australia?"

"I can see nothing of the kind. I looked over some old books with that intention, but your uncle's books were not by any means so minute and methodical as yours. He drew large sums and did not record how he spent them, whereas your housekeeping books are models of accurate accounts. I hope Mr. Phillips appreciates your talents in this line?"

"Quite sufficiently, I assure you. But with regard to this letter—what was Mr. McFarlane's advice on the subject?" asked Jane.

"To take no notice whatever of it; for that it would only bring trouble and discredit on me if she was no impostor, and be a very foolish thing if she was. He says that he had mentioned to my father, when he was making his will, that in all probability the widow, if left out of the will, would come upon the heir, and extort something very handsome from him; but that Mr. Hogarth had said sternly that she could not do it, for she had not a scrap of evidence that she dared bring forward to prove that she had ever been his wife. That he had no objection to provide handsomely for me, for I had proved that I was worthy of it; but for her, she had been a thorn in his side all his life; that he had done all for her that he meant to do, and all that she expected him to do. This made Mr. McFarlane think that he had given her a sum of money to get rid of her claims, and not a yearly allowance. She had certainly parted with me for money, and took no further care for my happiness. Mr. McFarlane never told me this before, but he wished to put me on my guard about this letter."

"My uncle, certainly, must have been a good deal excited when he made his will," said Jane.

"Mr. McFarlane says he certainly was so, and has no doubt he would have altered it had he lived a little longer—provided you had not married Mr. Dalzell, which was his great fear for you."

"Do you feel disposed, then, to answer this letter, or to prosecute any inquiries?"

"The whole affair is full of such unmitigated bitterness," said Francis, "that I shrink from stirring it up; but yet I certainly ought to know if this woman is my mother or not. Should not I, Jane? I rely on your judgment."

"It is your affair, Francis, not mine. I can scarcely dare to advise."

"What would you do under such circumstances?"

"I cannot tell what, with your character, I would do under such circumstances," said Jane.

"But with your character, which is a thousand times better than mine, my dear Jane? Only think for me. Things have been taken so much out of my hands by this detestable will, that I seem to lose the power of judging altogether on any matter that relates to it. I cannot aid when I most wish to do it. My father did not positively forbid me to assist my mother. I suppose, if he had done so, it would have raised as vehement a desire to that course of action as I now feel to oppose all his other prohibitions."

The expression of Francis' face was earnest—almost impassioned—as it turned towards Jane. She felt now that there was a reason for his apparent coolness—a reason that made her heart beat fast and her eyes fill. She did not speak for a few moments till she felt that her voice would not betray her, and then said:

"Since you ask my advice, I will give it, such as it is. I think I should in your circumstances make some inquiries; and you have come to the place where you are most likely to have them answered. I dare say Mr. Phillips knows Mr. Talbot, for I have heard his name in conversation; and if you have no objections to telling him about this letter, he could write—or, better still, Mr. Brandon, who talks of returning very soon, could make personal inquiries about this Mrs. Peck. It is quite possible she may be an impostor; for a good deal has been said in the newspapers about your inheriting Cross Hall, and she evidently has not got the right account of the story. She supposes you get it as heir-at-law, and not by will. It is an easy way of extorting money, to give out that one is a near relation of yours, and especially one of whom you have cause to be ashamed. Her story of a yearly allowance does not agree with Mr. McFarlane's impression either; but that may be policy—not positive unfounded fabrication. The orthography of this letter is not good ; but the expressions are more like vulgar English than Scotch. Your mother's name was Scotch ; and it was, at all events, a Scotch marriage. Will you speak to Mr. Phillips on this subject. He is kind, sensible, and discreet.

"Yes, I will. You think I ought to do so?"

"He is at home just now. Suppose I ask him to come to see you?"

Francis agreed, and was pleased with the kind reception which Jane's employer gave to him, as her cousin. He praised Miss Melville very highly, and said that in every point of view she was a treasure in his house. He then gave slighter praise to Elsie; but still spoke very feelingly of the position of both girls.

After a few such remarks, Francis asked Mr. Phillips if he knew Mr. Talbot, a solicitor in Melbourne.

"Yes, by sight and by reputation very well; but he was not a personal acquaintance of mine. Mr. Brandon was a client of his, and so was Peggy Walker; they could give you any information about him you might require."

"I suppose it is of no use asking you such a question—but do you know anything of a woman called Mrs. Peck—Elizabeth Peck, a client of —— ?"

The expression of Mr. Phillips's face stopped Francis' hesitating disclosure.

"Have nothing to do with her," said he—"a bad one, if ever there was one on this earth. Good heavens! what am I to hear next?"

"She says she is my mother," says Francis.

"Perhaps it is not the same woman," said Mr. Phillips. "Your mother! that must be a very old story; you look to be forty, or thereabouts. It must be a different person."

The trouble of Mr. Phillips's manner was undergoing some improvement. He walked across the room two or three times, and then said more steadily:

"Has she written to you? Would you let me see the handwriting?" The address was in a different hand from the letter itself, so Francis could not but show Mr. Phillips the body of the letter.

"May I read it? It is a delicate matter, I know; but I will be secret—secret as the grave."

Mr. Hogarth assented, and Mr. Phillips read the letter through, and then returned it.

"She says she is your mother, and for this very reason I believe she is not, for if ever there was a woman possessed with the spirit of falsehood, she is that woman. Mr. Hogarth, take no notice of her—do not answer her letter—send her no money; she is not so poor as she represents herself to be. I am glad you asked me about her, and no one else."

"Who is she? what is she?" was rising to Francis' lips, but the sight of Mr. Phillips's evident suffering checked his questions. After a short pause, he said that Miss Melville had advised him to consult Mr. Phillips.

"Good God! did you say anything about this to Miss Melville?" said Mr. Phillips.

"Yes, I did! I came to consult her on the letter, but it will go no further; let us call her back. Where is she?" said Francis.

"In the drawing-room," said Mr. Phillips, ringing the bell violently, "with Mrs. Phillips and Harriett, and Brandon, who has just come in. Alice is out on some errand, I believe; so that Miss Melville cannot speak to her, and she surely will not speak on your private matters to my wife and sister."

Jane was soon brought back to the breakfast-room, in which she had left her cousin with Mr. Phillips, and was surprised at the disturbed looks of both gentlemen.

"Mr. Hogarth has asked me about a person in Melbourne, whom I know to be an arrant cheat and liar. Her assertions in this letter are, no doubt, false; it is in keeping with her character that they should be so. He will take no further notice of the matter; and I hope and trust that her name will never pass your lips even to your sister, while under my roof, or even after you have left it. Mr. Hogarth, you will do us the honour to dine with us to-morrow, at half-past six? Mrs. Phillips and I will be most happy to see you"—and so saying Mr. Phillips hurriedly left the room, leaving Jane and Francis in the greatest bewilderment.

"I am not so sure that this Mrs. Peck is not my mother, for Mr. Phillips's opinion of her is exactly the same as my father's; but I think I will inquire no further. If inquiry is to grieve and annoy the best friend you have ever had, I will ask no questions. She may write again when she finds she gets no answer, and bring forward something more tangible than these vague allegations. But is this Mr. Phillips a passionate or vindictive man?"

"Quite the contrary. I never saw him agitated in this way before. He is of a remarkably easy temper — most indulgent to those around him."

"He is kind both to you and to Elsie?"

"Very kind indeed, and very considerate. If Mrs. Phillips were as much so, we would both be very comfortable indeed," said Jane.

"Does she show you any temper?" asked Francis.

"No, she dares not do it; for I am useful, and save her much trouble, and I have so much confidence in myself that I will not be interfered with; but poor Elsie is so diffident, so humble, so anxious to please, that she is constantly imposed on by an ignorant, thoughtless woman. Every one imposes on Elsie. Miss Phillips is inconsiderate, too, though she should know better. The servants impose on her, and the children, too—though she is so fond of the children, that I think on the whole they do her good."

"Do not you find that Elsie being here in such a capacity makes your superintendence of the servants more difficult?" asked Francis.

"Yes; I require to be more circumspect and more firm; but my life is quite easy, compared to hers. If I could only restore Elsie to that moderately good opinion which she used to have of herself in her more prosperous days, a great grief would be taken off my heart. I am the strongest, why should not I have the most to bear?"

"Have you tried her poems in London personally?"

"I have, but without success, and she has quite lost the wish to have them published. Your good opinion of her verses only gave her a little temporary encouragement."

"She writes none now, I suppose?"

"She has no time even if she had the inclination. Mrs. and Miss Phillips keep her so busy that I have difficulty in getting her out in the middle of the day to join me and the children in our walk or drive; but that the doctor insisted on as absolutely necessary, and I will not allow her to be deprived of it. He took quite a fancy to Elsie, and showed her much kindness. You ought to go to see him for your father's sake. But as to Elsie's poetry, she does nothing in this way except improvising to the children in the evening, as she is sitting at work. When they found out that she could, as they said, 'make verses up out of her own head,' they think all their stories should be transferred into ballads, and either said or sung to them. They are honest in their admiration of the talent, but rather exacting in their demands for its exercise; on the whole, I think, however, that it does her good, and I know the children are fonder of her than of me. I am so glad to see her preferred."

"Do you see much of Mr. Brandon? Could not he restore your sister to the self-appreciation so essential to happiness and contentment?"

Jane shook her head. "He is devoting himself to Miss Phillips, and Elsie scarcely ever sees him."

"One consequence of her taking this situation," said Francis, somewhat impatiently. "I fancy he admired her when I saw him at Peggy Walker's, months ago, and that he only wanted to be more in her society to have the impression deepened. Did you not think so?"

"His admiration went a little way, but not far," said Jane.

"Not so far as to lead to a proposal?" said Francis.

"People are generally far gone before they reach that point," said Jane, hoping to escape thus from a rather searching question; but a look from Francis, very sad, yet very pleasing to herself, made her change the subject altogether. She liked to believe that she was very dear to him; they could never marry; there was far too much to forbid it—duty, interest, near relationship. Francis' life and career were too important to be tacked to any woman's apron-strings, even though that woman was herself, and the plans she had so much delighted in she could see worthily carried out. She would not be the hindrance and stumbling-block to any good life, and least of all to his. But, until he met with a woman to be his wife and helpmate, she rejoiced to feel that she was first in his heart. When that event took place, as it ought to do before long, she would of course retire to a second and inferior position; but it was something to rest in with pleasure, that if it had been right and expedient, she would never have been displaced.

Sometimes mere possibilities — thoughts of what might have been — give very precious memories to cheerful tempers; while to those who are of a sad nature, they only enhance the gloominess of the present. Jane was not so cowardly as to let Francis see that she regretted anything for herself, and she proceeded to tell of her handsome salary, and how small her expenses had been, so that she was saving money; that Alice's salary would be equal at least to what she had at Mrs. Dunn's; and that the twenty-four pounds a year which he was allowed to give them was added to their savings; so that they were really making up a little hoard to begin business with Peggy when she left Scotland for Melbourne. She spoke of her money matters with frankness and confidence, and her cousin could not but see that she had now a reasonable hope of prosperity.

They had had a very long conversation before Elsie came in. She had had a number of troublesome commissions to execute, and had been detained beyond expectation, but had acquitted herself to Mrs. Phillips's satisfaction, and now came in with a little glow of pleasure on her face to meet her cousin, to feel the warmth of his affectionate greeting, to have a little talk about books and poetry, to refresh her for her monotonous and uninteresting daily work. Nothing was said about the letter Francis had received, and Jane and he seemed desirous to banish it from their memory.

CHAPTER VII.

HARRIETT PHILLIPS DOES A LITTLE BIT OF SHOPPING, WHICH IS SOMEWHAT FATAL TO HER PROJECTS.

AMONG other purchases which Elsie had made on the day of Francis' arrival, were the materials for a bonnet for Mrs. Phillips, which she had chosen, and which, as she was busily engaged in making up, so much excited Harriett's admiration, that she was seized with a desire to have one like it immediately, only that hers must be of a different colour, and a little modified in shape, to suit her different complexion and contour of face. On the following morning, as she was going out shopping herself, she asked Elsie to accompany her, to give her the benefit of her taste on this as well as some other purchases. Mr. Brandon was asked if he was not going down Regent Street? He said he was, and he would be very happy to go with Miss Phillips—as he had nothing particular to do, and Phillips was out, and Jane had the children at their lessons, and he did not find it amusing to be left *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Phillips.

Miss Harriett was quite unaware of her own weakness, or she never would have asked a lover to go with her into a draper's shop. Elsie had seen something of Mrs. Phillips's unreasonableness and unscrupulousness, but this was the first time she had been with her sister-in-law, and she did not expect from a young lady of such professed good principles, and good-nature, such an utter abnegation of these excellent qualities in dealing with tradespeople. She blushed for her companion, who did not blush for herself. She herself chose quickly, with the certain judgment of a fine taste and a practised eye; but what she fixed on as most suitable for Miss

Phillips's complexion and style, was not always of a suitable price. When driven from the expensive to something cheaper, then it was shabby and not fit to wear. Miss Phillips had come out determined to get as good things as possible, and to pay as small a price as possible for them; she would not be put off with an inferior article, and yet she was not willing to give the value of a superior. Elsie, who had herself waited on ladies of this character, and felt her body ache all over from the fatigue of being civil to them, was sorry for the shopmen, who fetched out box after box, and displayed article after article, without anything being exactly the thing which their customer wanted; while Walter Brandon stood beside the two ladies, finding it harder than ever to feel sentimental about Harriett Phillips.

Leigh Hunt recommends men to choose their wives in drapers' shops; for if a woman is conscientious, reasonable, and expeditious there, he thinks a man may be sure she will be fit for all the duties of life. But perhaps his test is too severe for general use, for many of the best of wives and mothers, the kindest of friends, and the most pious of Christians, are very far from appearing amiable under circumstances of such great temptation. The obsequious manners of British shopmen, who never show any spirit or any resentment, tend to lull conscience, while the strife between the desire for display and style, and the love of money, makes many women at once fastidious and unscrupulous. To Brandon, Harriett Phillips's conduct appeared ill-bred and mean; he could not help contrasting her with Elsie Melville, and acknowledging that the latter was the real gentlewoman. He began also to observe a certain imperiousness in Harriett's manner to Elsie herself, which struck him as being particularly ungraceful, and the old pity began to re-awake the old love. He had sometimes wished to speak to Alice just a few words to show that he had not been offended or piqued at her refusal, but never had had any opportunity, and on this occasion Miss Harriett did not seem disposed to give him any.

At last, after being in several shops, and turning over innumerable boxes of ribbons, laces, blondes, flowers, &c., all was purchased that was required, and even Miss Phillips was perfectly satisfied with the selection she had made.

"Oh, dear!" said she, looking at her watch, "how late it is! I quite intended to be in time for luncheon, for we started so early. Morning is always the best time for shopping—at least, I find I am better attended to then. But we are too late, and Mrs. Phillips will not wait for us. We had better have something to eat here, for I am very hungry—so, Mr. Brandon, I trust to you to find some place where we can make a comfortable luncheon; I have no doubt you know the best restaurateur, and afterwards you will get us a cab to go home in. I like to make gentlemen useful when I take them shopping with me."

"I am quite at your service," said Brandon, "for, as I said before, I have nothing particular to do."

"That is taking all the grace out of your gallantry," said Miss Phillips, "but if you acquit yourself well, I will forgive you that impolite speech."

Brandon did as he was desired—took the ladies to a fashionable restaurateur's, asked them what they would like, and ordered and paid for a very good and very expensive luncheon. Then he brought a cab, and accompanied them home.

"I really wish my brother could keep a carriage of his own," said Miss Phillips. "That is one of the few extravagances I quite sympathize with Mrs. Phillips in her desire for. It is so disagreeable to have to trust to these hired conveyances. One does not know who may have been in them before, and might catch fever or something of that kind."

"Perhaps one might," said Brandon, "though it never entered my head to think of such disagreeable things. But then I have never been accustomed to ride in a carriage of my own. Riding on horseback was my only means of locomotion at Barragong; and Melbourne, up to this time, has no such luxury for ordinary people as a hackney-coach stand, so that I cannot help being surprised at the cheapness and convenience of cabbing it in London. Whereas both of you ladies have been accustomed to private carriages, and must feel this very inferior."

"Oh, Alice! by the by, so you were, I suppose," said Miss Phillips.

"I preferred riding on horseback in those days," said Elsie; "but I think the drives with Dr. Phillips, lately, were the most delightful things I ever had in my life. After being quite debarred from anything but walking so long, I feel this hackney-coach really luxurious, I assure you."

"The drives in Derbyshire did you good, Miss Alice; you are looking better than when you came down," said Mr. Brandon.

"Oh! much better," said Miss Phillips. "Papa said it was all nonsense her being so alarmed about her health; but, both she and

Miss Melville were a little frightened—London suits her better than Edinburgh. I have not heard you cough, Alice, for a week or more."

"Yes, my cough is quite gone," said Elsie; "and I have much better spirits."

"But, by the by," said Miss Phillips, "I really want my bonnet to go out with to-morrow. Your London smoke is dreadfully destructive. I had no idea that mine was so bad till I put it on this bright day, and really it looks too shabby to wear, though I had intended to make it last another month. At home it would have looked better after three months' wear than it does after three weeks here. You know, Mrs. Phillips promised you should have it ready for me to go to the exhibition of pictures to-morrow, by middle day," continued she.

"I fear," said Alice, "that I cannot get it done in time, for we have been so much longer in Regent Street than I expected, and it will be nearly dinner-time before we get home; and Mr. Phillips insists, that as my cousin Francis is to dine with you to-day, I should be of the party."

"Indeed!" said Harriett, "and so you cannot finish my bonnet in time—it is a great disappointment to me."

"Mr. Phillips would not allow me to refuse, I know; and Jane, too, is anxious for me to have a talk with Francis."

"And you would like it yourself, too?" said Mr. Brandon.

"Yes, very much indeed," said Elsie, honestly.

"I will be glad to have the chance of seeing you. By the by, Phillips forgot to ask me; but I will forgive him, and invite myself."

"Oh! you need not stand on ceremony," said Harriett; "you are in the habit of coming in and going out of the house like one of ourselves; but really, Alice, are you sure you could not do my bonnet for me? There is so little work on the bonnets now-a-days, and you might have it done by two o'clock. Is not that the hour you appointed, Mr. Brandon?"

"Yes; or say half-past," said Brandon.

"Well, by half-past two. I am sure you have made bonnets in a greater hurry at your Edinburgh house of business often enough. I have seen how very quick you are. I quite wondered at the rapidity with which you got on with Mrs. Phillips's."

"But that is not finished," said Elsie, "and I promised it for the same hour to go to the Exhibition. I am very sorry, indeed, Miss Phillips; but, unless you can induce Mr. Phillips to excuse my appearance at dinner, I cannot possibly do it for you."

"Oh! very well," said Harriett, coldly; "I have a bonnet to wear, though it really is rather shabby; and Mrs. Phillips takes such pains to have everything fresh and fashionable, that I am sadly thrown into the shade. What a sum of money she contrives to spend every year on herself! but my brother is so exceedingly easy and indulgent, he denies her nothing. Don't you think her dreadfully extravagant, Mr. Brandon? I should be ashamed to spend money as thoughtlessly as she does. She does not care what she pays for a thing if it takes her fancy. Now, my bonnet will not cost two-thirds of what hers has done, and it will look quite as pretty, will it not, Alice ?"

" A little different in style, but quite as well," said Elsie.

" You see, Mr. Brandon, that if I have seemed to take a great deal of trouble over my purchases, it has been for some purpose. One cannot economize without some thought being bestowed upon such things as these."

Mr. Brandon could not but assent, but the act of politeness cost him an effort.

" Then you come to dine with us to-day, to meet this Mr. Hogarth ? Do you know, I have a great curiosity to see him. His father and papa being such old friends, long ago, gives me quite an interest in him ; and the extraordinary story of his succession to this Scotch property is so romantic. What is he like—is he presentable ?"

" He was quite the rage in Edinburgh when I was there, about the new year—a reading man, and a man of considerable taste—just your sort, in fact. He is a great friend of Miss Melville's, though I fancy, Miss Alice, that you do not care so much for him."

"I like him very much indeed, though I was longer in doing him justice than Jane was. The circumstances of our first introduction were very painful," said Elsie.

"If he is a friend of your sister's, that is quite enough for me," said Harriett. "I do not think I ever met with any one so congenial to my tastes as Miss Melville is. Ladies are so superficial now-a-days; their education is all for show, and nothing solid or thorough in it. My dear father was so careful to give *us* a thoroughly good education. It is very seldom that we meet with any one so well grounded as Miss Melville is. It is a good thing for my nieces that Stanley met with her. Your uncle *must* have meant that you should teach, Alice."

"Did Dr. Phillips mean that you should teach?" said Brandon, bluntly.

"No, no, certainly; but Miss Melville has learned so much that is quite valueless except in teaching—oh! a great many things quite out of the way; but I meant that the ground-work was the same. Poor Alice! all this odd training was thrown away on you."

"Not thrown away," said Brandon, firmly. "If it were not for Miss Alice's diffidence she would soon let you know how much she has profited by it. You should hear Peggy Walker on that subject."

"I am quite charmed with the estimation in which both you and my brother hold that wonderful woman," said Miss Harriett, condescendingly. "Stanley is quite enthusiastic about Peggy."

"And so am I, and with as good reason. Your brother owes her much, but I think I owe her more."

"More!" said Harriett; "oh! I see. Peggy nursed and saved the lives of Emily and little Harry, and perhaps of Mrs. Phillips, too, and my brother is greatly indebted to her; but I suppose she nursed your precious self through an illness all but mortal, so you are still more grateful. I know that you gentlemen think a great deal of number one. I understand the thing clearly."

Walter Brandon paused a minute. "No, it is not that, Miss Phillips; but Peggy raised my opinion of all women. Her courage, her devotion, her self-denial, and her truthfulness made me think more highly of all her sex; and if ever I am blessed with a wife she will have cause to cherish the memory of that homely Scotchwoman."

"To think that a gentleman who had a mother and sisters, should need such a lesson from a woman like Peggy," said Harriett, incredulously.

"One's mother and sisters are always looked on as exceptional people — placed like saints in a consecrated shrine," said Brandon; "but here was a woman with no particularly careful training or education, battling with the world alone and unprotected, and doing always the right thing at the right time, and in the right way—and truly she has her reward. Those orphan children will rise up and call her blessed, and if she has no husband to do it, her own works will praise her in the gates."

"I did not think that you knew as much of your Bible as to be able to make so long a quotation," said Miss Phillips, who could not understand or sympathize with Brandon's enthusiasm; but Elsie fully appreciated this generous and well-deserved tribute to Peggy's character. She saw now that she had been too rash in her rejection of her only lover. It was only now that she had lost him for ever that she had discovered the real goodness of his character; but she was pleased, very much pleased to find out that Peggy's conduct had been understood and admired by Mr. Brandon, and had done him such excellent service. To think him worthy was delightful, even though she should never see anything more of him henceforward. The colour rose to her cheek and the lustre to her eye, and when Brandon's glance met her bright face, he could not help confessing that she was very pretty, let the Phillipses say what they pleased, and the idea of having a little conversation with her in the evening was much more agreeable to him than Harriett would have at all approved of.

CHAPTER VIII.

FRANCIS MAKES A FAVOURABLE IMPRESSION ON HARRIETT PHILLIPS.

WITH all Harriett Phillips's success in society she had never had much admiration from the other sex. This she did not attribute so much to anything as to her own superiority; it really wanted a great deal of courage for an average mortal to propose to her. Her unconscious egotism had something rather grand in it; it was rarely obtrusive, but it was always there. Her mind was naturally a vigorous one, but it had moved in a narrow channel, and whatever was out of her own groove, she ignored. She appreciated whatever Jane Melville knew that she was herself acquainted with, but whatever she—Harriett Phillips—was ignorant of, must be valueless. Now a comfortable opinion of oneself is not at all a disagreeable thing for the possessor, and kept within due bounds it is also a pleasant thing to one's friends and acquaintances. Brandon had been disposed to take Harriett Phillips at her own valuation, and to consider her very superior to himself in many things; while she liked him, for his attentions gave her importance; and though he wearied her sometimes, she could make up her mind to pass her life with him without any feeling of its being a great sacrifice. But he must stay in England; all his talk of returning to Victoria was only talk; her influence would be quite sufficient to induce him to do that. Though her heart was, in this lukewarm way, given to Mr. Brandon, she had a great curiosity to see this Mr. Hogarth, whom Brandon had called, in his rather vulgar colonial phraseology, "just her sort." She laid herself out to please the new comer; and Brandon was disposed to take offence—and did so. The events of the morning had made an impression on him; but if she had possessed the tact which sympathy and imagination alone can give, she might have appeased him, and brought him back to his allegiance. She did not guess where the shoe pinched, and she still further estranged the lover she had been secure of. She was charmed at the idea of making him a little jealous; it was the first opportunity she had ever had of flirting with another person in his presence, and the flirtation was carried on in such a sensible way that there was not a word said he had a right to be offended with. She only talked of things about which Brandon knew very little, and Mr. Hogarth a great deal, and she thought she was convincing both gentlemen of her great conversational powers. It was really time Brandon should be brought to the point, and this was the way to do it. While Brandon felt the chains not of love, but of habit, dropping off him, and wished that Elsie Melville was beside him, and not sitting between her cousin and another Australian, who was talking to her vigorously on his favourite subject of spirit-rapping and table-turning, and she was listening so patiently, and making little smart speeches—he could tell quite well by the expression of her eyes, though he could not hear the low sweet voice distinctly enough to tell exactly what she said. He recollected the party at Mrs. Rennie's, and how pleasant her voice was; and felt Harriett Phillips's was not at all musical, at least, when she was talking about the fine arts and to-morrow's exhibition to Mr. Hogarth; while Francis wondered at any one presuming to have so much to say while his cousin Jane was in the room.

"Now, as to table-turning, Mr. Dempster," said Harriett, who fancied she saw Brandon's eyes directed to that side of the table a little too often, "you will never convince me there is an atom of truth in it. I am quite satisfied with Faraday's explanation. You may think you have higher authority, but *I* bow to Faraday."

"Faraday's explanation is most insufficient and most unsatisfactory; it cannot account for things I have seen with my own eyes," said Mr. Dempster.

"But to what do all these manifestations tend?" asked Jane. "Of what value are the revelations you receive from the so-called spiritual world?"

"Of infinite value to me," said Mr. Dempster, "I have had my faith strengthened, and my sorrows comforted. We do want to know more of our departed friends—to have more assurance of their continued existence, and of their continued identity than we have without spiritualism. I always believed that nothing was lost in the divine economy; that as matter only decayed to give way to new powers of life, so spirit must only leave the material form it inhabits to be active in a new sphere, or to be merged in the One Infinite Intelligence. But this is merely an analogy—a strong one, but only an analogy, which cannot prove a fact."

"But, Mr. Dempster, I think we have quite sufficient grounds for believing in immortality from revelation. In scientific matters, I bow to Faraday, as I said before; in religious matters, I would not go any further than the Bible. But if that does not satisfy you, of course you must inquire of chairs and tables," said Miss Phillips, with a condescending irony, which she thought very cutting.

"The Bible is indistinct and indefinite as to the future state—so much so that theologians differ on the possibilities of recognition in heaven," said Mr. Dempster. "Now, eternal existence without complete identity is not to me desirable. That our beloved ones no longer have the warm personal interest in us which they felt in life—that they are perhaps merged in the perfection of God, or undergoing transmigration out of one form of intelligence to another, without any recollection of what happened in a former state, is not consoling to the yearning human heart that never can forget, and with all the sufferings which memory may bring, would not lose the saddest memory of love for worlds. This assurance of continued identity is what I find in spiritualism, and it meets the wants of my soul."

"What extraordinary heathenish ideas!" said Miss Phillips, who in her Derbyshire retreat had never heard anything of pantheism, or of this doctrine of metempsychosis as being entertained by sane Englishmen. "If you have such notions, I do not wonder at your flying to anything; for my part, I have never been troubled with doubts."

"The Bible is, I think, purposely indistinct on the subject of the future life," said Elsie. "Each soul imagines a heaven for itself, different in some degree from that of any other soul; but to me memory and identity are so necessary to the idea of continued existence that I cannot conceive of a heaven without it."

"I do not know," said Mr. Dempster, shaking his head. "Till I saw these wonderful manifestations, I had no clear or satisfactory feeling of it, and now I have. The evidence is first hand from the departed spirits themselves, and their revelations are consistent with our highest ideas of the goodness of God, and of the eternal nature of love."

"'That which is seen is not faith,' St. Paul says, and the very minuteness of your information would lead me to doubt its genuineness," said Francis. "I do not think it was intended that we should have such assurance; but that we should have a large faith in a God who will do well for us hereafter as he has done well for us here. But though I may not feel the need of such assurance, I do not deny that others may. There is much that is very remarkable about these spiritual manifestations;—whether it is mesmerism, or delusion, or positive fraud, I think it is a remarkable instance of the questioning spirit of the day, unsatisfied with old creeds and desirous of reconstructing some new belief."

"I should like you to come to a *séance*," said Mr. Dempster, glad to find some one who was disposed to inquire on the subject. He had only recently become a convert, and was very anxious to induce others to think with him. "I am quite sure that you will see something that will impress you with the reality of the manifestations."

"I should like to go too," said Mrs. Phillips.

"I certainly should not," said Harriett. "I think these things are quite wicked,"

"These questions have never given me any trouble," said Mr. Phillips, "and to my mind, Mr. Dempster, the revelations, such as I have heard at least, are very puerile and contemptible; but that there must be a singular excitement attending even an imaginary conversation with the dead I can easily believe, and I do not care for exposing myself to it."

"Nor I," said Brandon; "as Miss Alice says, I have got my own idea of heaven, and I am satisfied with it. I think we are not intended to know all the particulars."

Why did Brandon, in giving no original opinion of his own (poor fellow, he was incapable of that), give Elsie's argument in preference to hers? Miss Phillips felt still more inclined to be agreeable to Mr. Hogarth from this slight to herself, and began to think that an inquiring spirit, in a man at least, was more admirable than Brandon's lazy satisfaction with things as they are at present.

Mr. Dempster's eagerness after a possible convert was only to be satisfied by Francis making an appointment with him to attend a *séance* on the following evening in his own house. And then the conversation changed to politics—English, foreign, and colonial—in which Francis and his cousins were much interested.

Mr. Dempster was rather an elderly man, who had lost his wife and all his family, with the exception of one daughter, who was married and settled in South Australia. Though so enthusiastic a believer in spiritualism, he was a very shrewd and well-informed man in mundane matters. He had been a very old colonist on the Adelaide side; and, having been a townsman, had taken a more active part in politics than the Victorian squatters, Phillips and Brandon. They were all in the full tide of talk about the advantages and disadvantages of giving to their infant States constitutional government, and allowing each colony to frame its constitution for itself. The good and the evil effects of manhood suffrage and vote by ballot Francis for the first time heard discussed by people who had lived under these systems, and English, French, and American blunders in the science of politics looked at from a new and independent point of view. At what Jane and Elsie considered the most interesting part of the conversation, Mrs. Phillips and Harriett, who cared for none of these subjects, gave the signal for the ladies to withdraw, so they had to leave with them.

Jane saw the children to bed, and Elsie got on with Mrs. Phillips's bonnet, while the gentlemen remained in the dining-room; but both reappeared in the drawing-room by the time they came up-stairs. Elsie did not like to disappoint any one, and the idea struck her that if she got up very early in the morning, and things went all well with her, she could finish Harriett's bonnet also in time, for really Mrs. Phillips's new one would make her sister-in-law's look very shabby. It was the first new bonnet she had been trusted to make since she came; she had had *carte blanche* for the materials, and had pleased herself with the style, and Elsie believed it would be her *chef-d'œuvre.* The idea of giving Miss Phillips such an unexpected pleasure made her feel quite kindly disposed towards her, though the feeling was not reciprocated, for as Harriett did not know of Elsie's intentions, she could not be supposed to be grateful for them; but, on the contrary, she felt a grudge at her for enjoying herself in this way at the expense of her bonnet. Harriett Phillips played and sang very well; her father was fond of music, and that taste had been very well cultivated for her time and opportunities, and she had kept up with all the modern music very meritoriously. Perhaps it was this, more than anything else, that had made her Dr. Phillips's favourite daughter, for in all other things Georgiana was more self-forgetful and more sympathising. Stanley, too, admired his sister's accomplishment; he had missed the delightful little family concerts and the glee-singing that he had left for his bush life, and if it could have been possible for his wife to acquire music it would certainly have been a boon to him; but as she had no ear and no taste, even he saw that it was impracticable; but Emily was to be an accomplished musician. She did not go to bed with the little ones, but sat up to play her two little airs to her papa's friends—to teach her confidence, Mrs. Phillips said, but, in reality, to give her a little spur to application.

"As for Emily needing confidence," whispered Brandon to Alice Melville, "that is a splendid absurdity. These colonial children do not know what bashfulness or timidity means—not but what I am very fond of all the Phillipses, and Emily is my favourite."

"She is mine, too," said Elsie; "she is an affectionate and an original child, with quick perceptions and quick feelings. I believe she is very fond of me; I like little people to be fond of me."

"Not big people, too?" said Brandon, with an expression half comic, half sad.

Elsie blushed. Emily came up to her dear friend, Mr. Brandon, and her favourite, Alice. "Aunt Harriett is going to play and sing now, and after that, Alice, you must sing. I like your songs better than Aunt Harriett's twenty times, because I can hear all your words."

"I cannot sing," said Elsie, "I never had a lesson in either music or singing in my life."

"Oh! but you sing very nicely; indeed she does, Mr. Brandon: and there is not a thing that happens that she cannot turn into a song or a poem, just like what there is in books, and you would think it very pretty if you only heard them. We get her to bring her work into our nursery in the evenings, and there we have stories and songs from her."

"You are in luck," said Mr. Brandon; "but now that you have told us of Miss Alice Melville's accomplishments, we must be made to share in your good fortune."

"No, indeed," said Elsie; "as Burns says, 'crooning to a body's sel' does weel eneugh;' but my crooning is not fit for company, except that of uncritical children."

"You know I am as uncritical as the veriest child," said Brandon. "I must have given you a very erroneous impression of my character, if you can feel the least awe of me; but I recollect your twisting a very innocent speech of mine, the first evening I had the pleasure of meeting you, into something very severe. That was rather ill-natured."

"Alice is not ill-natured at all," said Emily. "Aunt Harriett sometimes is. She is looking cross at me now for talking while she is singing."

"It is very rude in all of us," said Elsie, composing herself to give attention to Miss Phillips's song.

"I tell you what, you dear old boy," whispered Emily. "I don't think Alice will sing here, or tell you any of her lovely stories; but I will smuggle you into the nursery some day, and you will just have a treat."

"What have I done since I came to England," said Brandon in the same undertone, "that I should have been banished in this cruel way from the nursery? Did you ever refuse me admission at Wiriwilta—did not I kiss every one of you in your little night-clothes, and see you tucked into bed? If I was worthy of that honour then, why am I debarred from it now?"

"You saved our lives, papa says — you and Peggy—and so we always liked you; and, for my part, I like you as well as ever I did now; but we are in England now, and it is so different from Weriwilta — dear old Weriwilta, I wish I was back to it. I wish papa was not so rich, for then we would go back again; but it's no use as long as he has got enough of money to stay here. The letters that came the other day—-you recollect."

"I got none," said Brandon; "I suppose mine are sent by Southampton."

"Well, I don't think they had good news, or papa's face looked rather long, and he has been so quiet and dull ever since; so I am in hopes that things are not going very well without him, and then we will have another beautiful long voyage with you, and get back to dear, darling Australia again. Harriett wants to go back too."

"What a chatterbox you are, Emily," said her aunt, who had finished her song. "It is quite time you were in bed."

"Not quite, auntie; papa said I might sit up till ten to-night; and Mr. Brandon and I are so busy talking about old times, that I do not feel it a bit late."

"Old times, indeed," said Harriett; "what old times can a little chit like you find to talk of?"

"Oh, the dear old times at Wiriwilta, when we were such friends; and the time that I cannot recollect of when there was the fire, and Peggy and this old fellow saved our lives. I wish I could remember about it—mamma does, though."

"Indeed I do," said Mrs. Phillips, with a tranquil expression of satisfaction at the thought of the danger she had escaped. "We was all in terrible danger, and all through that horrid doctor. Stanley should have let me have my own way, and taken me to Melbourne; but he would not listen to reason."

"Well, Lily, you are none the worse now, and I hope you do not feel it burdensome to be so much obliged to our old friend Brandon."

"Oh no, not at all."

"You need not be," said he, laughing; "don t attempt to make a hero of me: a mere neighbourly good turn happened to have important consequences. Peggy's conduct was far beyond mine."

"But you were badly scorched," said Emily. "Do let us see the scar on your arm once more—I have not seen it in England." Brandon indulged the child; turned up his sleeve, and Emily gave the arm a hug and a kiss.

This was rather a strange exhibition for a drawing-room, Harriett Phillips thought, but Brandon never was much of a gentleman. Even Stanley had sadly fallen back in his manners in Australia, and what could be expected of Brandon? Mr. Hogarth had more taste; he had the dignified reserve of a man of birth and fortune; he had made remarks on her musical performance that showed he was really a judge. It was not often that she had met with any man so variously accomplished, or so perfectly well bred. He had promised to accompany them to the exhibition of paintings on the morrow, and she had great pleasure in anticipating his society, if it were not for the thought of her bonnet.

CHAPTER IX.

A BONNET GAINED AND A LOVER LOST.

"My letters have come at last," said Brandon, next morning, as he joined his friends at breakfast. "My overseer, I suppose, wanted to show his economy, and posted them by the Southampton mail, which does not suit me at all. I would rather do without my dinner on mail-day than have my letters delayed for nearly a week. And now there is bad news for me, I must leave by the first ship. Had I got my letters when you received yours, I should have gone by the mail steamer and saved a month, but I cannot possibly manage to get off so soon."

"Oh! Mr. Brandon," said Mrs. Phillips,

calmly, "there surely is no such need for hurry."

"Everything is going to the dogs at my station. I will probably have to buy land at a high price; and there appears to have been great mismanagement, from the accounts I hear. Another six months like the last and I will be a ruined man. It is very hard that one cannot take a short holiday without suffering so grievously for it. What were your accounts, Phillips; I think you said they were rather unsatisfactory?"

"Not very good, certainly; but not so bad as that comes to. You will look to Wiriwilta a little when you return, and send me your opinion. I had better entrust you with full powers to act for me, for I should prefer you as my attorney to Grant."

"I hope he will not be offended at the transfer," said Brandon.

"Oh! I think not; he took it very reluctantly, for he said his own affairs were enough for him."

"And perhaps a little more than enough," said Brandon, with a smile. "In that case I will be very glad to do all in my power for you."

"I have no wish to return to Australia," said Mr. Phillips, "if I can possibly afford to live here. With a family like mine, England offers so many advantages. In fact, there is only one place in the world worth living in, and that is London."

"Very true, if you have enough to live on," said Brandon, shrugging his shoulders. "I must go now to work as hard as ever to get things set to rights again, and perhaps in another dozen of years, when I am feeble, old, and grey, I may return and spend the poor remnant of my days in this delightful centre of civilization. But with me, fortunately, there are only the two alternatives, either London or the bush of Australia—there is no middle course of life desirable. If I cannot attain the one, I must make the best of the other."

Harriett Phillips listened to all this, and believed that matters were much worse with Brandon than they really were. She had no fancy for a twelve years' banishment from England, nor for a rough life in the bush. Mr. Brandon had been represented to her as a thriving settler who had made money. She saw the very comfortable style in which her brother lived, and she had no objection to such an establishment for herself; but she was not so particularly fond of Mr. Brandon as to accept for his sake a life so very different and so very much inferior. She felt that she had been deceived, and she did not like being deceived, or mistaken, and she still less liked to make mistakes; and instead of blaming herself, she was angry with everyone else—her brother, her sister-in-law, Brandon himself—for leading her to believe that his circumstances were so much better than they were. Of course, he would ask her—he could not help doing so; but as to accepting him—that was quite a different question.

She had put on her old bonnet with a grudge at Elsie; and when Mrs. Phillips appeared in the drawing-room ready for the party to the exhibition in all the splendour of her new one, which really looked lovely, and she lovely in it, and Harriett caught the reflection of both figures in the large mirror, she felt still more dissatisfied with everybody than she had done before. The gentlemen were ready, and they were just about to start, when a light quick step came to the door, and a little tap was heard.

Harriett opened it, and was delighted to see Elsie holding in her hand the second bonnet completed—equally beautiful, equally tasteful, and apparently quite as expensive.

"Oh, Alice, how good of you! What a love of a bonnet! Come in and see Mr. Hogarth. Look, Mrs. Phillips—look at Alice's clever handiwork."

And Alice was introduced a little unwillingly into the drawing-room to be complimented on her taste and her despatch, and to shake hands with the two gentlemen. Miss Phillips was too much engrossed with her bonnet, and with the improvement it would make in her appearance, to observe the earnest, anxious looks of her two fancied admirers, as they greeted her sister's lady's-maid; or that they looked with interest and concern on her tired face, which, though now a little flushed with excitement, bore to those who knew the circumstances traces of having been up very late and very early over her work.

"I knew she could do it," Harriett whispered to Mr. Brandon, when Alice left the room; "she is so excessively quick. I never would have said so much about it yesterday, if I had not known she could easily do it; and does not mine look as well as Mrs. Phillips's? I said it would." And so she accepted Mr. Hogarth's arm, and went to see the pictures with a better judge than Brandon, in all the triumph of her new bonnet—the lightest, the most becoming she had ever had in her life: but her influence with Walter Brandon was lost for ever. He wished he had had Jane Melville, with her good common sense, or Elsie, with her sweet voice and winning ways, hanging on his arm instead of Mrs. Phillips, who was very uninteresting to him, though her great beauty and excellent style of dress made her an object of interest to other people, and who always enjoyed being well stared at in public places. But Jane was engaged with her pupils at this time, and Elsie was always kept very busy, so that neither of them could accompany the party, and Francis Hogarth felt disappointed, for he had anticipated the society of one or both of them.

How curiously the egotist, who fancies every one is engrossed with him or with her, would be disappointed if he or she could see the real thoughts of the people about them. How Harriett Phillips would have started if she could have read the hearts of Hogarth and Brandon, and seen what a very infinitesimal share she had in either.

Francis was only impelled to pay attention to Miss Phillips by his natural sense of politeness, and by the wish to make the situation of his cousins in the family pleasant, as far as it lay in his power to do so; while Brandon, who had at last struck the key-note of Harriett's character, was astonished to find new proofs of her selfishness and egotism peeping out in the most trifling circumstances. He observed how different her manner was towards him, now that a man of property in the old country had appeared in the circle of her acquaintances, and he could not fail to see that an additional coldness had come over her when his circumstances were supposed to be less flourishing, and this made him rather disposed to make the most and the worst of his bad news.

In Derbyshire, where she had her own established place in the household, and where her father and her sister Georgiana gave way to her so much, she had appeared more amiable than she did now. The armed neutrality which she maintained with her sister-in-law had amused Brandon at first, but now it appeared to him to be unladylike and ungraceful to accept of hospitality in her brother's house without any gratitude or any forbearance. He began to question the reality of her very great superiority over Mrs. Phillips; with all her advantages of education and society she ought to have shown more gentleness and affection both to her brother's wife and his children. He analysed, as he had never done before, her expressions, and weighed her opinions, and found they generally had more sound than sense; and her habitual assumption that she knew everything much better than other people, became tiresome when he did not believe in her superiority.

He began, too, to contrast the charm of a face, when the colour went and came with every emotion, with that of one so unimpressible as Harriett Phillips's—whose self-possession was nearly as different from that of Jane Melville as it was from the timidity and diffidence of Elsie. Jane's calmness was the result of a strong will mastering the strong emotions which she really felt, and not in the absence of any powerful feeling or emotion whatever. Brandon had learned to like Jane better as he knew more of her, and rather enjoyed being preached to by one who could practise as well as preach. He felt that if she was superior to him she did not look down on him; and she certainly had the power of making him speak well, and of bringing out the very large amount of real useful practical knowledge that he had acquired in his Australian life. Her eagerness to hear everything about Australia and Australians certainly was in pleasing contrast to Miss Phillips's distaste for all things and people colonial; but above all, Miss Phillips's want of consideration for Alice Melville had weaned Mr. Brandon's heart from her. It was not merely unladylike; it was unwomanly. He could not love a wife who had so little sympathy and so little generosity.

CHAPTER X.

A SEANCE.

FRANCIS HOGARTH did not forget his promise to Mr. Dempster, and went to his house at the hour appointed, to be witness of the *séance*. A number of his friends and fellow-converts were there, and the proceedings of the evening were opened by a short and earnest prayer that none but good spirits should be permitted to be present, and that all the communications they might be permitted to hear might be blessed to the souls of all of them.

The medium was a thin, nervous-looking youth of about nineteen; but, as Mr. Dempster assured Mr. Hogarth, was in every way to be trusted, as his character was irreproachable, and of great sincerity and simplicity. Francis was very incredulous as to the appearances being caused by spiritual agency, and though he could give no satisfactory explanation of the extraordinary movements of tables, easy chairs, sofas, &c., he felt that these things were very undignified and absurd, as every unbeliever always feels at first; but the eagerness of the large party who were gathered together had something infectious in it. Many of them had known severe bereavement—many of them had been tossed on the dark sea of doubt and despondency—and the brief messages communicated by raps, or by the voice of the medium, gave them consolation and hope.

To Francis, the details communicated appeared to be meagre and unsatisfactory. The spirits all said that they were happy, which to some present was a fact of inestimable value, but to him it was a matter of course. He never had believed, since he had thought out the subject in early manhood, that God would continue existence if He did not make it a blessing. But to others who, like many before him, had intelligently accepted of a sterner theology, and who had been struggling through years of chaotic doubts and fancies for footing on which to rest, he saw that these assurances gave real strength and support. An hour had passed amidst these manifestations—the interest of the believers continued to be unflagging, but Francis felt a little tired of it. He had lost no dear friend by death. The future world had not the intense personal interest to him that it had to others. The dearest beings in the world to him were his two cousins, and they were divided from him by circumstances almost as cruel as the grave. How few have done justice to the sad partings, the mournful alienations that have been caused by circumstances! Bereavement in all its varied bitterness has been sung by many poets in strains worthy of the subject; but circumstances are so insidious, and often so prosaic, that their tragical operation has been rarely treated of in verse.

His thoughts recurred, as they always did when he felt sad or serious, to Jane Melville—to the will that had brought them together, and at the same time so cruelly parted them—to the unknown father, whose own life had been blighted by the loss of domestic happiness, dealing so fatal a blow to the son whom he meant to bless and reward, by placing him in circumstances where he could not help loving Jane, and forbidding—so far as he could forbid—the marriage of two souls made for one another. Francis was wondering if his father now saw the mistake he had committed, or regretted it, when he was startled by the announcement that his father was in the room, and wished to communicate with him.

"How am I to know it is he?" said Francis, starting up incredulously, but at the same time somewhat awed by the mere possibility that such a one was there, out of the body, owning him as his son, which he had not done while he was alive.

"Does the spirit mean to communicate by raps or through the medium?" asked Mr. Dempster.

"By raps," was the answer given.

"Take the alphabet in your own hand," said Mr. Dempster, "and ask the spirit his name, and then pass your finger over the alphabet—the rap will arrest you at the right letter."

Francis passed his finger along the alphabet, half disdainfully, half in curiosity. The rap stopped him at the letter H. He had never thought the curious little taps sounded so unearthly before. Next he was stopped at E, then at N, then at R, and next at Y; and so on, till the full name of Henry Hogarth was spelled out.

"You wish to communicate with me;—then you love me now?"

The three quick raps meaning "Yes" was the immediate reply.

"Are you satisfied with what I have done at Cross Hall since your death?"

Again the alphabet was called for, and the raps spelled out, "Very much pleased."

"Are you sorry for the will you made?"

"All will be well in the end," was spelled out.

"Did you see your nieces' sufferings unmoved—their poverty, their disappointments, their unfitness for the work that you had set them to do?"

"They are better for what they have suffered," was spelled out; "and you too."

"Does the letter in my pocket come from my mother?"

The three raps replied in the affirmative.

"Did you give her an annuity, as she says you did?"

A single rap, meaning "No," was the reply.

"What did you give her, then, to make her forego her claims on you?"

"A sum of money," was the reply.

Francis observed a great difference in the character of the raps proceeding from Mr. Hogarth from those of the spirit last summoned, which had been supposed to be that of Mr. Dempster's eldest daughter, who had died at sixteen, and of a lingering disease. The latter were faint, and almost inaudible to an unpractised ear, while those of his father were firm and distinct. There was never any power of knowing from what part of the room the raps would come, and as answer after answer appeared to come so readily to his questions, it is not to be wondered at that Francis felt excited and awed at the mysterious intercourse.

"Advise me, my father; tell me what to do if you see more and know more than I can do. Should I assist my mother, as she asks me to do?"

The single impatient rap, meaning "No," was the immediate reply.

"Is she not in poverty and want?"

Again the answer was "No."

"Should not I write to her?"

"No; have nothing to do with her," was the answer.

"Can I ever have what I most desire in the world? You promise improvement—I want happiness," said Francis, passionately, startled out of himself by the extraordinary pertinence of the answers to his questions, and careless in the company of absolute strangers as to what they thought of him.

"Patience! I watch over you," was the reply.

"What do you do in the spiritual world?"

"I am learning," answered the spirit, "from one who loves me."

"What is her name?" asked Francis.

The alphabet was in his hands; he was anxious not to let any sign of his give any clue in case of its being all imposture and extraordinary quickness of sight. He purposely passed over the letters, but was rapped back by the recognised signal till the name "Marguerite" was spelled out.

"Yes," said he to himself, "you think all is well in the end; you have met Marguerite in the spirit world, after being separated for a lifetime in this, and this is very sweet to you; but I want Jane now to help me to live worthily. Can I win her in this life?"

"After a time," said the spirit, rapping by the alphabet this answer to his inaudible question.

"You then can answer mental questions," thought Francis. "What connection can Mr. Phillips possibly have with Mrs. Peck, or rather Elizabeth Hogarth? But to this inaudible question the spirit made no reply, and told him, through the medium, that he was disinclined for any further communication. Certainly it was a question which he felt conscious he had no right to put, after what Mr. Phillips had said to him. The spirit was in the right not to answer it.

"Are you convinced?" said Mr. Dempster, who had seen the surprise with which Mr. Hogarth had spelled out the answers.

"I am staggered," said Francis. "The general answers might have been given at random, but the names, I am convinced, were unknown to every one here except myself."

"It always is the names that convince people," said a friend of the host's.

"I have asked some questions as to the future," said Francis. "I do not know if it is allowable to do so. Do your spirits claim to have a knowledge of what is to come?"

"Oh, yes; they do—those of the highest class in particular," said Mr. Dempster.

"I do not see how they can," said Francis, musingly. "To know the future is a prerogative of Omniscience, and even the highest created intelligence cannot tell what His purposes may be."

"How do we guess at the future with sufficient accuracy to direct us in the present but by generalization from experience? Now, a departed spirit certainly has had a wider experience—sees more into other souls and their workings than we can possibly do while encumbered with these robes of clay—and consequently can make a juster generalization," said Mr. Dempster.

"But not an infallible one?" said Francis.

"No; certainly not," said Mr. Dempster.

"But, as to the present, their views are sure to be correct?" said Francis.

"If they are good spirits, and not lying spirits. We prayed against their appearance, and I do not believe that the spirit who has been communicating with you was of that kind," said Mr. Dempster.

"How, then, do you judge between lying spirits and true ones?" asked Francis.

"By the nature of their communications. A false or an immoral message cannot be delivered by a good spirit."

"Then you still continue to be the judges of the spirits? You do not bow your morality to theirs—you select and reject as you see good?"

"Morality is universal and eternal," said Mr. Dempster. "Even God himself cannot make evil good or good evil by any fiat of his own.

"Then have these manifestations taught you anything that could not have been otherwise learned?" asked Francis.

"They have taught *me* much that I could not have otherwise learned. I cannot say what other people may attain to through pure reason or through a simple faith in the revealed will of God. There are diversities of administration, but the same spirit," said Mr. Dempster, with a simple earnestness that weighed much with

Francis. But here Mr. Dempster's attention was called to a message from an old friend who had just died one of the saddest of deaths, having been lost in the Australian scrub twelve years before.

These raps were still stronger than those of Mr. Hogarth, being violent, and following immediately on the question wherever a negative or affirmative was used.

Mr. Dempster said he had been a powerful young man, of the most unquestionable determination, and that the raps were always consonant to the character of the spirit when in life. He eagerly turned to identify him. The name was correctly given; the date of his death; the length of time he had existed without food and water, and the clothes he had on when he died. Then a message was sent to his aged mother, who had so long mourned for her youngest born, that he was expecting her soon to join him in the spirit land. The place where the old lady lived was mentioned, and her state of health was described as being bad.

"All perfectly true, perfectly true, Mr. Hogarth. Poor Tom! His was a distressing fate. I expected that we should have something good in manifestations this evening, but I scarcely looked for anything so perfectly satisfactory as this. Every name and every date exactly correct. Are you not convinced now?"

"I am certainly very much staggered," said Francis. "Have you been thinking much about your friend or his mother lately?"

"Not particularly that I know of; but I liked him very much, and I often think of his solitary death."

"Have you heard that his mother is in bad health?"

"She has been an invalid for years, and you heard her age; but we must make a note of the date, and ascertain if she is particularly worse to-night. I feel sure that there are not many days of this earth for her, and how blessed a thing it is that we have such an assurance of a reunion and recognition as these communications give to us."

When Francis got into the open air after the excitement of the evening, he was inclined to think that all had been a dream or a delusion, but the answer and the names recurred with startling significance; the difficulty and almost the impossibility of any cheat or collusion, and the apparent sincerity of all who had been sitting by him during the manifestations, increased the bewilderment of his mind.

"I must see Jane about this to-morrow," said he; "her clear head can perhaps solve this curious problem; but if I had not seen it, I would not have believed what I saw. Will she believe without seeing? Yes, she will receive my testimony, for I would receive hers. After a time I may hope to be happy. How long a time, I wonder?"

CHAPTER XI.

SPIRITUALISM, LOVE, AND POLITICS.

GREAT was the grief of Emily when she heard that Mr. Brandon was going away in a week or two, and that he might never come back to England for a dozen of years; and now, instead of spending the rest of his time in London with them, he had to go to Ashfield, to spend his last days in England with his mother and sisters and nephews and nieces. She felt quite wronged by this conduct, and bade him good-bye when he came to take his temporary leave of them, with an amount of sulkiness rather foreign to her character. Lessons were a far greater bore than usual on that day, and both Emily and Harriett tried Jane's patience sorely. After they were set free for two hours in the middle of the day, Jane found her cousin was waiting for her to go out with him, and she wished very particularly to see him, on account of some news she had got from Scotland. He had not been satisfied to have none of her society on the preceding day, and had appointed with Mrs. Phillips to come when she would be at leisure, which that lady had forgotten or neglected to tell Jane or Elsie. It was Jane alone whom he wished to see—it was to her alone that he could speak about the communication with reference to his letter. Jane was sorry that Elsie was not asked to accompany their walk; but when Francis said he had something on his mind, and proceeded to tell all the singular circumstances of the previous evening, she listened with the greatest attention and with a suspended judgment. When he came to the mental question which related to herself, he simply called it something on which his heart was greatly set—it might have been his allotments or his cottages; but Jane asked no questions, and took no notice of his want of completeness in his narrative. Then he told of the inquiry as to Mrs. Peck's connection with Mr. Phillips, which he ought not to have asked, and which had received no answer. He paused for Jane's opinion before he came to narrate Mr. Dempster's message from his friend lost in the bush.

"Now, what do you think of all this, Jane?"

"I am a little staggered, as you were," said she. "I wish you had heard more or less—it bewilders me."

"Should I then follow this advice so strangely given?"

"I think the advice exactly corresponds with what you had resolved to do at any rate. It need not influence you either one way or the other. You asked my advice the other day, but neither from me nor from a departed spirit should you accept of or follow any advice which appears to your own soul not to be good. You cannot shift off your personal responsibility. As I said, it is your affair, not mine; and I feel sorry that consideration for me, and for my generous employer, has weighed so much with you that you scarcely give the claims of your mother their just due."

"And the spirit said she was my mother, but at the same time advised, or rather commanded me to have nothing to do with her. I do not wish to have anything to do with her. What is it to be grateful for—such a loveless, joyless life as mine has been—thwarted even now in my dearest hopes and wishes."

"Francis," said Jane, "you have a great deal to be thankful for, and so have I. With all the sufferings of the past year, I would not have been without it for the world. We have both learned much, both from circumstances and from each other."

"Jane, I am weary of all this talk about progress and perfection. I am hungering for happiness, as I told this strange interlocutor last night," said Francis, earnestly.

"And you will attain to it, Francis! but do not set your heart on what it is not right, or wise, or expedient for you to obtain. And you cannot look me in the face and say that, if one thing is denied, you have not many sources of happiness."

Jane looked at him with her sisterly eyes, feeling the pain she was giving, but determined not to show that she had any personal regret. It was very kind, but it was very discouraging. She felt for him like a sister—and nothing more.

"If I have any eyes," said Francis, trying violently to change the subject, "Brandon is still an admirer of your sister's. What in the world keeps him from declaring himself? Why does he not offer her all he has, and all he may hope to gain? He cares no more for Miss Phillips than I do, and she would never consent to accompany him to Australia. And Elsie looks so pretty and so sad, she needs a protector; she would be grateful to him; she cannot stand alone, as you do; and she knows she makes your position here much more difficult."

"The truth is, Elsie refused him, and it is difficult for a man to make a second offer when he has such slight opportunities of seeing her, even if he has not made a transfer of his affections."

"I would make an opportunity—I would write—I would ask point-blank to see her—I would speak to you about it, if I were in his place. It is cowardly in Brandon."

"Why, Francis, you are very unreasonable. Elsie refused him as positively and uncompromisingly as possible on her way down to Derbyshire. I do not think she would do so now; but how is he to know that?"

"I would hint as much to him, if I were you. Why, Jane, a word from you might secure your sister's happiness for life, and you shrink from saying it."

"Indeed I do," said Jane. "I think no good can come from interfering in such matters, and I am particularly ill-adapted for such a delicate communication. Besides, if one may judge by the last few weeks, it is Miss Phillips who ought to receive the offer of marriage, and not Elsie. If her brother were to ask what Mr.

Brandon's intentions are, as he might very well do, the result would be a marriage of two very ill-assorted people. She cannot comprehend the real goodness and simplicity of his character, and despises the man whom she is scarcely worthy to wait on. She even looks down on her generous brother; she has no love for her brother's children, and no sympathy with anyone. I am really very glad to observe, with you, that her influence with Mr. Brandon has decreased of late; but he certainly has paid her a great deal of attention, and she expects a proposal."

"Her face has no charm to me," said Francis. "Taken feature by feature, it is handsome enough; but it wants play and variety, and it has not the perfect harmony of Mrs. Phillips's. That is a singularly beautiful index to a soul that appears to be nothing particular. I have heard it said that we have all our ugly moments. Have you ever seen such a time with Mrs. Phillips?"

"There are times when she certainly does not look beautiful to me, nor to Elsie either. But I wanted to speak to you of your own affairs. I had a letter from Tom Lowrie this morning, in which he says that he hears from one of his old schoolfellows that you have been asked to stand for the Swinton group of burghs, and that every one says you will easily be able to carry them over the duke's man."

"Ah! has he heard about it? I should have told you of it, but the more pressing personal interest of the letter from Melbourne, Mr. Phillips's strange agitation, and this mysterious spiritual communication, put it out of my head for the time, and a word from you would put it aside for ever," said Francis, with the old wistful look.

Jane, like all women who are interested in public matters at all, and they form a very small minority of her sex, rather over-estimated the importance of a parliamentary career. She knew the turn of her cousin's mind, his education as a man of the people, his position as a man of property, his earnest desire to do right, his patient habits of business, and his thorough method of research and inquiry, were all certain guarantees that he could not fail; and she had the belief that his abilities, and readiness, and confidence would make him an eloquent and skilful debater. It appeared to her to be an object of great importance that a perfectly honest and independent member should replace for the burghs in her native country the nominee of a great family, who only voted with his party, and never had done any credit either to the electors or to the nation. She said truly when she spoke of her ambition finding its vent in dreams about him and her pupil, Tom Lowrie. She certainly had influenced Francis Hogarth's character greatly during the turning-point of his life; the ideas she had nursed in her trials had been impressed on his mind with force and earnestness, and through him she could hope to give a voice to a number of her crotchets and theories. Where a woman writes as well as thinks, she does not feel this dependence on the other sex so strongly; for, though at a disadvantage, she can for herself utter her thoughts —but Jane, as my readers will have observed, was not literary. She was an intelligent, well-informed, observing woman, but her field was action, and not books. In her present situation she had very little time for reading; but, from all that she saw, and from all the conversation she could hear, she found hints for action and subjects for thought. To see Francis in the British Parliament was a worthy ambition, and to give up such a probable career for an inglorious and obscure life with herself was not to be thought of. His wistful looks and earnest tones were to be treasured up in her heart for ever; but her own love for him was not of that imperious and unreasonable nature that she could not live without him.

CHAPTER XII.

CHIEFLY POLITICAL.

"Do you think that you can really get in?" said Jane, eagerly. "I know that my uncle said the Liberal interest was much stronger in the burghs of late, and you are really the fittest man they could have. I was quite pleased to hear from Tom that you are so soon appreciated. Of course, he is enthusiastic on the subject."

"I do not know if I am appreciated or not, but the burghs are a little tired of a struggle between the Conservative duke and the Whig earl, always resulting in some one being put up on both sides, to whom there were no strong objections, and no strong recommendations—a mere nobody, in fact."

"You are popular in the county, are you not?" asked Jane.

"No, not exactly. I do not think I could possibly carry the county, even if I could afford the contest, for I am not considered a safe person for the landed interest. I gained some éclat on the road trusteeship, by opening a road which was a great public convenience, but I lost more than I gained there, by my allotments, which are looked on as a dangerous precedent. The cottages make me popular with those who have no votes, and with the more enlightened class of farmers, but the old school of tenants object to them, and almost all the landlords fear that they may be asked to lay out money in the same way. On the whole, I am considered rather a dangerous man in the county, but in the burghs I am popular, I think. I have the character of being a man of the people, who has not lost sympathy with his class, and I can afford to give them my time and services, such as they are."

"If you go in, you want to do so independently," said Jane.

"Yes, I do; and here I risk my election. The Liberal party want a certain vote, which they think they could secure better by sending up a stranger from the Reform Club, who knows little and cares less about the burghs, than by supporting a man who will look into political and national questions for himself, and who will not be a mere partisan. If they mistrust me and send some one to divide the Liberal interest, I can only save the Swinton burghs from the duke's man, by retiring."

"But how foolish to divide the Liberal interest," said Jane.

"My dear Jane, you forget that his party is dearer to a party man than anything else. The question to be considered—and I want to see how your nice conscience will guide you through the bewildering mazes of political morality—is this: Whether it would be right to pledge myself to the party, in which case I am sure of my return, or to remain independent, and so make it very doubtful," said Francis.

"You cannot vote always with the Liberals—

at least with the Liberals who form governments and oppositions," said Jane. "They are often in the wrong, and particularly so in the bestowal of patronage, which, I suppose, is a very important matter among party politicians. The appointments which the Whigs have made of late years have often been most shamefully actuated by family or party reasons, and not with a single eye to the public service. Many times the Conservatives are really more liberal than the Whigs—sometimes the Whigs are more Conservative than the Tories. It is of the first importance that there should be many men such as you in Parliament, who will watch over both parties; and, if this determined dualism is at work everywhere, how are such men to get into the legislature? But, surely, you could carry the burghs—you can speak, can you not?"

"I don't know, I never tried; but I dare say I could beat Mr. Fortescue, the duke's candidate. He has never opened his mouth in the House, but to give his vote, and on the hustings he made no figure."

"Try the independent course, by all means; you may be beaten, but then if you succeed, you will be so much more useful."

"It will probably cost me a thousand pounds."

"It is shameful that the duty of serving one's country for nothing should be so dearly bought. If you get in, you must try to introduce some measure to reduce election expenses."

"A difficult matter. The object of the Parliament, when once assembled, is to make it difficult and expensive to get in. To keep the candidature within the limits of a privileged body is considered a great safeguard."

"Not by me, or by you," said Jane. "I want you to get in because you know the feelings and the wants of the people who have no votes better than ninety-nine out of a hundred, who are members of Parliament. Oh! Francis, I feel quite sure that if you exert yourself you can get in. And what is a thousand pounds?—you have it to spare."

"I am doubtful, said Francis, shaking his head, "if I can afford to go into Parliament."

"Have you not two thousand a year? and do not lawyers who can scarcely make a living go into Parliament? I am sure there is some perjury on the subject of property qualification—but as, perhaps, the latter is unnecessary, it is the less matter."

"They go to increase their means, or their practice, or their influence, and generally take the first opportunity of accepting something better than the Chiltern Hundreds under Government," said Francis.

"There must be something very wrong somewhere, if a country gentleman of your standing cannot afford to give his services to the House of Commons. Have you brought the requisition that was sent to you?" said Jane.

"Yes; do you really want to see it? I have it in my pocket, and if I really felt in earnest on the subject, I ought to communicate with Mr. Freeman, the earl's political agent in London, to know how he will favour a man who would support the general policy of Government, but who will hold himself free to vote against them whenever he sees them in the wrong. My only means of securing the earl's influence is by convincing him that he cannot carry the burghs against Fortescue by such a man as he has to put up; and as I am rather doubtful on that point, I can scarcely assert it confidently. If he chooses to withhold his family interest he can make me fail; but if it comes to the push, I would rather retire than let Fortescue get in."

"Electioneering, then, is very nice and difficul work," said Jane.

"Very difficult for the scrupulous, the sincere and the far-seeing."

"Who are just the sort of people whom w want to see in Parliament."

"Whom *you* want to see, Jane, but not whon the two great parties wish to see. Then, shoul I go to Mr. Freeman, do you think, with thi requisition and a frank declaration of my principles, and hear what he says on the matter

If the earl supports me I may count on a majority of twenty—a safe enough one; and if not, shall I spend the thousand pounds in a glorious defeat; writing the boldest and most independent of addresses; making the most uncompromising speeches from the hustings, if I can find voice?"

"No fear of your finding voice, Francis," said Jane, warmly.

"Regardless of the savour of rotten eggs; undaunted by the sneers at my birth and breeding; the tales about my father, the jeers at my mother; and only retiring at the last moment, when I have said all that I have got to say, but which, I fear, my audience were not much in a mood to hear. My own idea is, that I should succeed better in the calm argumentative debates in Parliament, than as a hustings orator, or a popular declaimer."

"Yes, you will, and you certainly should try the second, that you may attain to the first. My uncle was asked to stand for these burghs some ten years ago, but he was too crotchety, and could not write an address that was at all likely to be acceptable to the electors, so he gave up the contest before it began. Yet, you know, it would be well to have a few crotchety people in the House of Commons. The game of life, whether social or political, is not played by only two sets of black and red men—like chess or backgammon."

"I have met a gentleman at Miss Thomson's pretty frequently," said Francis, "who struck me as having the most remarkable qualifications for a member of Parliament. He has a habit of recurring to first principles which is rather startling, but which always forces you to give a reason for the faith that is in you, and which either confirms your opinion satisfactorily, or changes, or modifies it. He has retired from business on about 700*l.* a year—which he has made in America, principally—has no family, no cares, and plenty of leisure—is the most upright of men, and knows more of the principles of jurisprudence, and the details of commercial matters than any one I ever knew; but no constituency would choose him, and he cannot afford to throw away a thousand pounds for the privilege of having his say out. He is one of the electors of Swinton, and particularly anxious that I should contest the burghs. His own vote he can answer for, but he boasts of no large following; though he is a man who ought to exert mental influence, he is too far ahead to be popular. If I were to stand, and were to succeed, I will find him a most useful prompter; and with you to inspire enthusiasm for the public service, and this Mr. Sinclair to suggest principles and details, I ought to distinguish myself."

"I am quite sure that you will," said Jane; "so my advice is to lose no time in seeing Mr. Freeman. I cannot believe that people who call themselves liberal can act so illiberally as to endeavour to stifle independence. You will tell me a different tale to-morrow."

Francis did as Jane advised him, and as he himself thought he should do, and waited on Mr. Freeman. It happened to be a time of a lull in party politics; there was no question strongly before the public mind on which Whigs and Tories were so equally pitted that one vote was of extreme importance; there was no near prospect of a change of Ministry, and the great Whig houses had been much baited lately about their family selfishness and their party selfishness being quite as bad as that of the old Tory set. So it appeared to Mr. Freeman at the present crisis to be a very wise and expedient thing to offer support to an independent man like Mr. Hogarth, for it was very questionable if the duke, who had been more liberal in his expenditure in the towns, would not carry it against a mere club man, and they had no better man to spare. Mr. Hogarth, at least, was sure to ask nothing of the Government. His support, when they got it, would cost nothing; his adverse vote would be only on outside questions, as a rule. It would look very well for the county election, which was to be a very tough affair between a younger son of the duke and a younger brother of the earl, that Mr. Hogarth, of Cross Hall, should have the earl's cordial support in the burghs. His vote was secure for the Honourable James, and all those he could influence, he hoped. Francis said he could answer for his own, but his tenants must please themselves.

"Oh, yes, certainly; but tenants generally find it for their advantage to vote with their landlord," said the agent.

"I will give my tenants distinctly to understand that they must vote from conviction, and that that will please me. That is my view of being a Liberal," said Francis.

"And if all the other county proprietors had the same view the Honourable James would walk the course; but we must oppose all the stratagems of war of an enemy who takes every advantage, and strains to the utmost the influence of property and patronage."

"I want to go in with perfectly clean hands," said Francis.

"Bless you, so does everybody," said the parliamentary agent; "but somehow there is a lot of queer work must be done to get fairly seated on the benches."

"I not only wish it, but I mean to do it," said Mr. Hogarth.

"Well, well—I hope you will be able to manage it. I must introduce you to the earl. I think he will say, as I say, that he will give you cordial support; so that the sooner you get your address out the better—as soon in the field as possible, and don't fall asleep over it. The other party are like weasels—they are not to be caught napping; and will undermine what you fancy secure ground, if you only give them a chance."

The result of Francis' interview with the Earl was as satisfactory as that with the agent. Party for once was inclined to waive its high prerogative, and to allow a person to slip into Parliament without any pledge as to future action. His manner prepossessed the Earl; he received an invitation to dinner to meet a few political friends, and to talk over the canvass for the county, which was one on which all their strength was to be expended. Harriett Phillips was all the more interested in Mr. Hogarth when he had been invited to dinner with a peer of the realm, and stood a good chance of adding M.P. (though only for a Scotch group of burghs) to his name. Even Mrs. Phillips felt a little excited at the idea of a British member of Parliament, and seemed to view both Jane and Elsie with more favour than she had done before; while Mr. Phillips, anxious to do away with the impression of his first interview with Mr. Hogarth, was quietly and cordially hospitable, and hoped that the Swinton burghs would return him, that they might have the pleasure of his society in London for the coming sessions. Francis spent a week or more in London, and promised Miss Phillips to pay a visit to her father in Derbyshire by and by. Mr. Brandon was completely at a discount, and as fairly out of the circle of Harriett's probable future life at Ashfield as if he had sailed for Australia.

CHAPTER XIII.

GOOD-BYE.

WHILE Jane and Francis were discussing the state of Brandon's affections, the object of their solicitude was going as fast as the railway could take him to Ashfield, where his widowed mother lived with his unmarried sister, a confirmed invalid, and a widowed sister, Mrs. Holmes, the mother of those wonderful nephews and nieces whose ignorance on the subject of dirt-pies had so much impressed Emily Phillips. Brandon had always been very glad to go to see them, and to stay a short time, but the intolerable dulness of the place had always driven him back to London. Australians generally prefer a large town as a residence, and London most of all;

for though their relatives in small country towns or rural neighbourhoods fancy that it must be so much more lively with them than it is in the bush, there is a great difference between the dulness where there is plenty of work to be done, and the dulness where there is absolutely nothing.

Mrs. Brandon was a conscientious and, to a certain extent, rather a clever woman, but she had many prejudices and little knowledge of the world. Mary Brandon was the most amiable and the most pious and patient of sufferers, who only got out in a Bath chair, and received a great deal of care from her mother, while Mrs. Holmes devoted herself to her children with a fidelity and an exclusiveness that made her influence elsewhere almost infinitesimal. All of them loved Walter dearly, and were very anxious that he should be married—most disinterestedly—for their circumstances were straitened, and but for Walter's assistance, which had been given whenever he could possibly afford to do so, they would have found it difficult to make ends meet.

Mr. Holmes had been unfortunate in business, and the widow had sacrificed part of her jointure, and the invalid sister as much of her little fortune as was at her own disposal, to assist him in his difficulties. Their generosity had the usual result of only delaying the crash for him, and of finally impoverishing themselves.

One most promising brother had died at the close of a long, expensive professional education, which he had expected to turn to great account for the benefit of his sisters. Walter himself had been sent out to Australia in his father's lifetime with a better capital than could have been given afterwards, so that he always considered that he had got more than his share, and that his assistance was nothing at all generous.

The young Holmeses were taught and guarded by their mother night and day; she accompanied their walks, she overlooked their games, she read all their books before giving them to the children to read, and cut out or erased anything that she thought incorrect in fact or questionable in tendency. She allowed no intercourse with servants, and almost as little with playfellows of their own age. And when Uncle Walter from Australia came first to disturb the even tenor of their way by lavish presents of sweetmeats, cakes, and toys, and by offers to take the whole family to every attainable amusement, he was first reasoned with, and then, as he was not convinced, he was put down, his gifts returned, and the children instructed to say that they would rather not have the treats he offered. He certainly preferred the wild spirits and rebellious conduct of the little Phillipses, even in their worst days, to the prim good-child behaviour of his own nephews and nieces.

He had the pleasure of telling Mrs. Holmes on this occasion that the wild young Australians had been reduced to something like order by an admirable governess whom he had been the means of procuring for them: that in spite of all the over-indulgence she had suffered from, Emily was proving a very tolerable scholar—that she had good abilities and an excellent heart, though she did climb on his knee for comfits, and beg to be taken to Astley's. Mrs. Holmes wondered at his procuring a governess for the children, and asked a good deal about her, with the view of ascertaining if her brother was fixed at last; but he talked about her with perfect *nonchalance*, saying that she was a particular favourite of an old servant of his called Peggy Walker, and that her account of Miss Melville's qualifications was perfectly satisfactory, as the result had proved. Mrs. Holmes was bewildered as to the curious social relations of Australian people, but her mind was set at rest about Jane Melville.

"But, Fanny," said he to his sister, "you know I have come to bid you good-bye in a week or ten days. I cannot help it; things look so badly just at present that unless I am on the spot I cannot see my way at all clearly. I have little doubt that I will work things all right again; the master's eye makes all go well. There need be no difference in the little allowance I sent to my mother and you—that will be sent home regularly as before. But I want to assist you otherwise if you will allow me to do it. You have enough to do to bring up those six children of yours, even with my little help. I will take your boy Edgar with me; as I am not going overland it will not be so expensive. I will train him to be useful to me, and make a man of him."

"No, no, Walter, I could not let him be away from under my own eye; he is so young—his education is not finished," said Mrs. Holmes.

"And never will be, if you keep him always at your apron-string. You cannot do it, Fanny; you must turn him into the world some day, and surely he will be better turned out under my guidance than under none at all. Why, the lad is sixteen, and though he is uncommonly ignorant of the world, he knows enough of books and that sort of thing to acquit himself very fairly in Australia. I promise to do my very best for him, and he can be of great service to me very soon, if he has only a head on his shoulders. And though it is very hard to find out what your children are fit for, I dare say the boy has average intelligence."

"Average intelligence!" exclaimed Mrs. Holmes; "his memory is admirable. If you would only examine him in history, or geography, or Latin, or scientific dialogues, or chronology, you would find——"

"That I do not know the tenth part of what he does, no doubt," said Brandon. "But that is not what will make him get on in the world. You cannot afford to give him a profession."

"I fear not. I wish I could. Perhaps I might by more economy. The education of my children has cost me very little hitherto, only the classics and mathematics from the curate. I should like to bring Edgar up for the Church."

"But, my dear Fanny, if you were to give him a profession, you must send him away from you. If I take him I will do my utmost to get him on, and I will really look after him, and keep him out of mischief, better than you can do at a public school or a university."

"Oh! Walter, you know what a state Victoria is in—full of runaway convicts, and all sorts of bad characters, attracted there by the gold-diggings. I should not like Edgar to meet with such people."

"At my sheep stations he will see little or nothing of these people. I will keep him busy, and by and by, when he comes to man's estate, I will give him a start; and if you think I succeed with Edgar, I will take Robert, too, when he is old enough."

"I know, Walter, that you mean very kindly by me and mine, but I do not care so much for my boys being rich, or getting on, as you call it; I want them to be good. I do not wish to throw them into the world till their principles are fixed, and strong enough to withstand temptation. Edgar is very young, and you are not firm enough to have the guidance of him."

"I can be firm enough in important things," said Brandon; "but there are a number of little matters that a lad should learn to determine for himself. Let us ask Edgar if he would like to go. Don't you say anything for or against, For once let the boy exercise his choice, and have the freedom of his own will. You may reverse his decision afterwards if you see fit."

Mrs. Holmes assented to this, but with some fear and trembling. Edgar was called in, and his uncle kindly and fairly made him the offer. The lad hesitated—looked at his mother, then at his uncle, then at the floor.

"What do you think I should do, mamma?" said he.

"Your mother wishes you to make your own choice," said Brandon.

"Then I think I should like to go with you, Uncle Walter."

"No, no; I cannot part with you yet, my dear boy."

"Nonsense, Fanny; do not stand in the boy's light," said Brandon, a little ruffled at being taken at his word, and the lad's decision reversed by his mother.

"I don't want to go if you do not wish it, mamma," said Edgar, looking rather ashamed at his choice.

"Consult our mother and Mary on the matter, Fanny; I believe they will be more reasonable."

The advice of both grandmother and aunt was to the effect that Mrs. Holmes should take advantage of her brother's kindness, and entrust Edgar to his care. It was not without a great effort that she made up her mind to part with her son, and she had many serious compunctions of conscience afterwards; but as his letters home were regular and very prettily expressed, and as his uncle Walter generally added a few lines to say that the boy was doing remarkably well, and growing strong and large, she took comfort, and hoped that all was for the best.

Brandon was rather surprised at the cool reception he got from Harriett Phillips on his return; it was a relief to him to see that she could part from him without regret, for he felt none at leaving her. He had been putting on his Australian set of feelings, and preparing to like his bush life very much, as he had done in reality before. He had Edgar with him when he came to bid the Phillipses good-bye, and Emily was much amused at the idea of this model lad going out to Melbourne in a large ship, and seeing dear Wiriwilta before she could do so. She gave him messages to some of the people, and desired him to inquire after the welfare of her pet opossum and her rose-crested cockatoo, and write her a full, true, and particular account of them all, and of how he liked the colony, which Edgar readily promised to do.

"And so this Mr. Hogarth has left London, Emily?" said Mr. Brandon.

"Oh, he has gone home to see about getting into Parliament—what stupid work it must be!"

"Don't talk so absurdly," said Aunt Harriett.

"I see by the newspapers that he is likely to be put up; and you think it stupid work, Emily, do you? You are a young lady of taste. I think the same."

"He is quite sure of success," said Harriett Phillips, who thought the question and remarks might have been addressed to her, as the best informed person in the house.

"Miss Melville will be pleased at her cousin's going into the political line," said he.

"Indeed, we are all pleased. I never saw any one so fitted to shine in Parliament," said Harriett. "He has promised, when the election is over, to visit papa; their politics will suit, I think."

"And how is Miss Melville?" asked Brandon.

"Quite well, she is always well; but we have been very much troubled about servants of late. I believe really that all the good servants have gone to Australia, for we cannot hear of a housemaid or nurse to suit us, and it puts every one about. I know it annoys me, and Miss Melville (who holds rather a singular combination of employments, and I must say that she certainly discharges both of them extremely well) is particularly engaged just now, making up her housekeeping books."

"And how is Miss Alice Melville? She is not so invariably well as her sister is."

"No, she mopes more. She has not half the spirit of Miss Melville; but I believe she is quite well just now."

"Well," said Brandon, with a half sigh, "I have come to bid you all good-bye; no one can tell when we may meet again."

"Oh! no fear," said Mrs. Phillips, "we will see you here again in a year or two. Mr. Phillips is often grumbling about his affairs, but I know it just ends in nothing."

"By the by, Emily," whispered Brandon, "you promised if I was a good boy that you would give me a great treat. You will never have another opportunity."

"Oh! yes," said Emily," "I recollect quite well—come along with me," and Brandon followed the child to the nursery. Elsie was singing something to a tune that sounded like that of "Chevy Chase," a great favourite with Brandon in his childhood—but she caught the sound of footsteps at the door and stopped abruptly.

"This is our nursery," said Emily; "mamma says it is far better than the old one at Wiriwilta, but I do not like it half so well. I have brought Mr. Brandon here, Alice, to hear your songs and your stories, as I promised him the night you would not sing in the drawing-room when he asked you."

"Go on, Miss Alice, I beg of you; do not let me interrupt you. Indulge me for once—that old air carries me back many years," said Brandon.

"Oh, no," said Alice; "I could not venture on a stanza before you. You cannot imagine what doggerel I make to please the children."

"It is not doggerel; it is beautiful," said little Harriett; "it is the best song of all, and the newest—the one that Alice has made about the fire, when we were such tiny babies; and how poor mamma was so weak and ill, and papa was away, and the flames were all around; and Peggy and Jim—you recollect Jim, black Jim, Mr. Brandon—and Mrs. Tuck—Martha, you know—were working so hard to save us; and then when Mr. Brandon came up on his horse, Cantab—we told Alice his name was Cantab—she knew all the rest of the story—and rode so fast and got off in such a hurry, and fetched water and quenched the fire. Oh! Mr. Brandon, it is a lovely song."

"And all made up after our talk of old times the other night; for I thought it was just the thing for a ballad, and Alice will do anything I ask her. You see that we *will* make a hero of you, and we will sing this song in your praise when you are far away," said Emily.

"Then I am not to be forgotten," said Brandon, speaking to Emily, but looking very hard at Elsie. "I do not wish to be forgotten by any one here; but I do not care for being remembered as a hero, which I do not deserve to be—but as a—a friend."

"Our friends here have been so few that we are not likely to forget any of them, and with Emily beside us we stand a good chance of hearing your name frequently," said Elsie.

"And you made a song about me—actually about *me*," said Brandon, looking as if he wished the five young Phillipses out of the way.

"Oh! Alice can make a song about anything," said Constance; "she made one about my little kitten."

"And such a nice one about my humming-top—how it goes whiz—whiz," said Hubert.

"And Peggy told Alice and Miss Melville about the fire, and all about you long ago—long before she saw any of us," said Emily. "She made up a pretty story to amuse them just as Alice does for us when they were sad and dull—only Peggy's story was all true, and Alice's are mostly not."

Brandon's quick eye could observe the faintest additional flush pass over Elsie's already crimson cheek, and guessed that Peggy's revelations had been a little too true and minute. What motive had she to conceal anything about him when she was relating her own experiences to divert the minds of the two poor girls in their troubles and perplexities? Was this the solution of his refusal in the railway carriage? If it was, he should try again. He had been a fool, an idiot, to give up so readily at the first nay-say. Now, it was too late; his passage was taken out for himself and Edgar, and he was to sail on the morrow; but if things looked decently well at Barragong on his return he must write, though he was no great scribe.

"Shall I not call Jane?" said Elsie, who felt embarrassed by his looks and manner, and dreaded his saying anything particular before a group of the sharpest children in the world. She is extremely busy, but if you have come to bid her good-bye, she must see you for that."

"You used to talk of going to Australia—to Melbourne, I mean—with your sister and Peggy, when she returns."

"We hope to be able to do so," said Elsie.

Then I will see you again—I *must* see you again. Don't call your sister yet—don't."

Here Brandon was interrupted by the entrance of Miss Harriett, whose curiosity as to where Emily had taken her friend had led her to the nursery, a place she seldom visited.

"Why, Emily, what a thing to bring Mr. Brandon into the nursery! You are a dreadful girl! I must tell Miss Melville of this."

"I have only come to bid good-bye to some friends," said Brandon.

"They should have come to you in the drawing-room, only those children are so fond of their liberty that they prefer the nursery, where they can torment Alice to their hearts' content, to anything like restraint in the drawing-room. What a litter the place is in! I do wish we could get a nurse."

"I must see Miss Melville, too, and bid her good-bye," said Brandon.

"She is in the housekeeper's room," said Harriett. As you have been introduced by Emily into the nursery, perhaps you will let me take you there."

"Good-bye, then, Miss Alice," said Brandon.

"Good-bye," said she.

Brandon could not drop a word of his intention to Jane, for Harriett Phillips was at his elbow when he made his adieu; but somehow Elsie treasured up his parting looks, and embarrassed expressions, with as much fidelity as if he had made an open declaration of love. Many a woman's heart lives long on such slight food as this. And the next day, Brandon was on board, and soon on the high seas, on his way back to his sheep-stations and his troubles.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANCIS HOGARTH'S CANVASS AND ELECTION.

THERE can be little doubt that Jane Melville was a good deal influenced in her decision as to the position she ought to hold with Francis by the letter she had received from Tom Lowrie on the morning of the day in which her cousin had betrayed to her more unmistakably than ever the state of his own heart. It was something more for him to give up, and, as I have said before, she rather over-estimated both the importance of the public duty and the amount of success in it which Francis was likely to attain to. It might seem to impartial observers rather Utopian to hope and expect some regeneration of the political world of

Great Britain from the return of an intelligent country gentleman of independent and original principles, for a few obscure Scottish burghs, to be one of an assembly of six hundred and fifty-eight legislators, but it is from such Utopianism, felt, not in one instance, but in many, that the atmosphere of politics, both in Great Britain and in Australia, can be cleared and purified. When people, whether as electors or candidates (or, as in the case of Jane Melville, even those who are neither), take an exaggerated view of the trouble, expense, and annoyance attending the discharge of public duty, and form a low estimate of the good that each honest energetic individual can do to his country by using every means in his power to secure good government, to promote public spirit, and to raise the standard of political morality, the country is on the decline. It may grow rich, it may increase in national prosperity, but, as a nation, it wants the soul of national life and national freedom. I prefer Jane Melville's rather unreasonable hopes to the pusillanimous fears—the *lassez-faire* policy of those who think they know the world far better, and who believe the game of public life is not worth the cost of the candle that lights it up.

If she had been the only woman in the world, or the only woman likely to suit Francis, and to make him happy, she would have felt very differently; but surely he could have no difficulty in finding, among the hundreds of thousands of marriageable women in Great Britain, some one as likely (she even thought, more likely), to satisfy his heart than herself. It was only because circumstances had made him know her so well, and because he had been so intimately connected with no one else, that he believed he loved her. He was a man whom any woman might easily learn to love; and if she steadily held out to him that she was only his dear sister—his faithful friend, and that she could never be anything else, he would ere long form a tenderer tie. But she hoped and wished that his lot might be cast with a good woman, who would not grudge her the secondary place that she felt she could not give up. She tried to convince herself that it could be only friendship really on his part; but he had been so unused to affectionate friendships, especially with one of the other sex, that he was very likely to mistake his feelings.

The state of her own heart she did not like to look into very closely; she knew that Francis was inexpressibly dear to her, but the absolute absence of all jealousy made her doubt if it were really what is called love. .She could look forward without pain to another person becoming more to him than herself. My readers will think that if it had been really love, it would have forced itself upon her, and burst through all the barriers that were laid across its course. But love in a strong nature is a very different thing from the same amount of love in a feeble nature. If it had been her own property and career that had to be given up for his sake, her love would have probably conquered all private ambition ; but the very high estimation in which she held her cousin, fought against her instinctive wish to make him happy. And if the irrevocable step were taken, what security would she have that he might not regret it?

She dwelt in her own mind on the disparities between them, which, but for the peculiar circumstances in which they had been placed by her uncle's will, must have prevented the formation even of the friendship, now so close and so precious. She was perhaps scarcely aware that such contrasts are more favourable to the growth and the continuance of love than too near resemblance in character and temperament. She was so different in many ways from him—he was literary—she was practical; he was poetical and artistic, and by no means scientific—she was destitute of taste, and saw more romance in the wonders of science than in much of the poetry he admired so much; he was aristocratic by temperament, and only forced by her influence at the turning-point of his life into her democratic views—she could not rest from the over-activity of her nature, while he liked repose, meditative, literary, and *dilettanti.* The strong sense of duty, which certainly was the guiding principle of his nature, led him to exertion; while Jane worked because she could not help it. With Jane's temperament Francis never would have stayed for fifteen years clerk in the Bank of Scotland, while there were new countries to conquer, or new fields to work in. He found pleasure in beautiful things; all disorder or disorganization was positively painful to him. To begin again a life of comparative poverty, burdened with the care of Elsie, would be far more trying to him than to her; for though she had been brought up in greater affluence, she cared less for the elegances of life. She loved him far too well to allow him to sacrifice a great deal more than she thought she was worth for such a doubtful good, and she entered heart and soul into the prospects of this election, as the thing which would decide Francis' fate, and would give him still nobler work to do, to keep him from regretting what it was better he should not obtain.

The spiritual communication on the subject of

Francis' hopes, to the effect that after a time he should succeed in the object dearest to his heart, had made far less impression on her mind than on his. She had not heard the unearthly taps; she had not been startled by the appropriate answers; she had not herself had her hand arrested at the letters which spelled out the unknown names. Her curiosity led her to attend a *séance* with Francis at the same place, but everything on that occasion was a failure. The spirits had not got rightly *en rapport* with her; her dead relations were misnamed; their messages were uncharacteristic; and the spirit of Mr. Hogarth never could be summoned up again. She therefore determined to dismiss the whole subject from her thoughts, and advised Francis to do the same. Mr. Dempster, however, was not willing to relinquish his half-made proselyte; and certainly, the less Jane was inclined to believe in these manifestations the more she became attached to the simple-minded pious visionary who rested so completely in them.

Jane's own life was particularly full of work and of worry at this time; for, as Miss Phillips said, the servants were troubling her. Miss Phillips might have taken part of the blame to herself, if she had conceived it possible that she could do wrong; for it was on her account that the housemaid had given warning—she said that two missusses, that was, Mrs. Phillips and Miss Melville, was enough for her, and she could not submit to a third, and she couldn't abear Miss Phillips's interference. The nursemaid took umbrage at Elsie sitting so much in the nursery with the children, though it was what Mr. Phillips liked, and what the children delighted in; and besides there was no other convenient place for her except her own bedroom, which was too cold for comfort and too dark for fine work. Elsie's position in the house was rather anomalous, and certainly added to Jane's difficulties.

While Francis was busily engaged with his canvass, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips took a short tour on the Continent. Harriett would have liked to accompany them, and threw out hints to show that she expected an invitation; but her sister-in-law thought they had done quite enough for her, having her all that time in London, and taking her about everywhere. Jane was to be left in charge of the children, and Elsie was to go with her mistress. Now that Mrs. Phillips had a lady's-maid, she could not possibly travel without one; and as neither her husband nor herself knew any modern language but their own, Elsie might be useful besides as an interpreter, as she understood French very tolerably, and had learned a good deal of Italian. There might be advantage by and by from being able to advertise French and Italian acquired on the Continent, for perhaps a school might suit the Melvilles better than going into business; so Jane was very glad indeed that her sister, who would profit most by it, should take the trip rather than herself. Miss Phillips returned to Derbyshire, as she had no desire to stay even with such a congenial companion as Miss Melville, with the drawback of a houseful of children.

In the meantime Francis' canvass went on briskly; Mr. Sinclair constituted himself his most active agent, and certainly took more trouble and fatigue about it than any paid agent; but he sometimes seemed to do his cause more harm than good by his constant recurrence to first principles, which alarmed the jog-trot old Whigs, and occasionally even the out-and-out Radicals.

The five burghs, whose representation Mr. Hogarth was about to contest, were grouped together because they lay in adjoining counties, and not because they had any identity of interests. In the good old times, before the passing of the Reform Bill, each burgh sent one delegate to vote for the member. The delegate was elected by the majority of the town council, and as that body invariably elected their successors, the representation of the citizens, either municipal or parliamentary, by such means, was the most glorious fiction that has ever been devised by the wisdom of our ancestors. The double election in this case had no good tendency. The Reform Bill was, on the whole, a very good thing, more because it was a great change in the representation, which was carried out without endangering the constitution, and was an earnest of still greater reforms being made in the future, than because there is any very great improvement either in the character of the electors or their representatives; but to Scotland it was a greater boon than to England; for the semblance of representative institutions without the reality was a mockery to a free people, and a very mischievous mockery. In 185— the burghs had each their registered voters on the roll, who each voted for his favourite candidate, so that the votes of five hundred men in one burgh could not be neutralized by those of eighty men in another.

The stronghold of the Conservative party lay in Swinton, the genteel, and Freeburgh, the county town. The Liberals mustered very strong in Ladykirk, which had taken to the woollen manufactory within the last quarter of a century, and had increased very much in extent and population, so that it had far more voters paying 10*l.* rent than any of the other towns.

In Auldbiggin and Plainstanes parties were so equal that no majority on either side could be reckoned on, but the Whig majority in Ladykirk was expected to overtop the Tory majority in the two first towns by as much as would secure Hogarth's return. The Honourable Mr. Fortescue was again to be put up for the Tory interest, for though he had not distinguished himself last parliament, he was a perfectly safe party man, and connected by marriage, not with the duke, but with a Tory marquis, next in consideration in the district, who had great influence in the county returns.

Mr. Fortescue found he had a different man to fight with in Francis Hogarth from his opponent last election, Mr. Turnbull; so he felt he needed more backing, and brought with him a Mr. Toutwell, a great gun with his party, who went his rounds both with and without him, and acted as his mouthpiece.

"One has confidence in an experienced man," said this gentleman, in a confidential way, to the electors, when he met them singly or by twos and threes. "If the earl had put up a man of greater parliamentary experience, he might have had a chance to oust Mr. Fortescue, but his picking up this quill-driver, who has spent his life behind a bank-counter, and offering him to the burghs, is really an insult to the constituency. Mr. Fortescue is no orator—there is enough of us in the House to speak, Heaven knows—there is only too much talk about nothing; but Mr. Fortescue's vote was never given wrong—never once did he forsake his colours! Don't look to the speeches—look to the division list, and there you will see that you can trust your member. As for this Hogarth, there is not a single thing that he has done that inspires confidence, even with his own party. He is far too Radical even for the earl. I cannot imagine how that old fox has been so misled as to take him up—probably for a consideration. Look at those allotments he has made over or given away to his labourers—the most dangerous innovation that could possibly be made in such a country as this. When the non-propertied classes see such things, they fancy they should all share in the spoil. This is how Socialism is to come in upon us. These levelling and no doubt godless views prepare the way for such revolutions as we have seen with so much horror across the Channel. Old Cross Hall was a sceptic of the worst kind, and picked up his views of religion and politics in France, and this new man could not rest till he too went to France to improve his mind in the same way. These cottages he has built on his estate, no doubt to increase his popularity, and perhaps at Ladykirk they may go down, but in Swinton and Freeburgh people see things differently, and even Plainstanes and Auldbiggin like no such new-fangled notions put into working people's heads. The idea of compelling proprietors to build such palaces for their tenants' labourers, when the labourers themselves do not ask for them, and do not care for them when they get them!—and I hear that Hogarth says they should all build houses just like his. Mere clap-trap to win political influence—for his own people break the windows, and take no care of their fine new houses. I am sure property is burdened heavily enough without this absurd crotchet for additional spoliation. Old Cross Hall was crazy enough to leave him a lot of money as well as the estate; he certainly might have left the money to the poor girls he had brought up like his daughters, and not have left them to starve, and to be a burden on the country; and young Cross Hall can see no better way of spending it than in throwing it away for the chance of this seat—but he has no chance. The bank-clerk's hoards will be somewhat diminished before all his expenses are paid. We need take no trouble—indeed, Mr. Fortescue might walk the course."

But, in spite of all this careless talk, Mr. Fortescue, and Mr. Toutwell too, did take a great deal of trouble, and employed every possible means to secure the certain majority of thirty which they spoke of. The greatest hope they had was in a split between the new man and the earl's party, and Mr. Fortescue's agents managed to make the most of every little point in dispute.

Reports reached the earl from different quarters, mostly reliable, that the return of Mr. Hogarth would not at all strengthen his party in the country. He had but a small following, and was comparatively little known. The county voters were mostly tenant-farmers, who generally voted with their landlords. The race of portioners, or small proprietors, was dying out in ——shire, as it is in all the British island, and large proprietors were very much opposed to Cross Hall, on account of his loose views as to the rights of property. At Newtown, however, which was a large manufacturing town of recent growth, and not a royal burgh, but which was of very great importance in the county representation, Francis Hogarth was extremely popular. He was the real friend of the people—the only man in the county who seemed to understand anything about the rights of labour. The electors of Newtown felt aggrieved that they, who were far more numerous than those of any of the five royal burghs, were thrown into the county representation, where their votes did not count for one-fourth of what they would do in the burghs. They felt personally interested in the return of Cross Hall (as he was generally called), and would not leave a stone unturned to secure it. The non-electors of Newtown—a still more numerous body—regretted that they could do nothing to further his views, except by going *en masse* to Ladykirk on the day of the election, and combining with the non-electors there, so as to make as great a physical demonstration as possible, for they considered that Cross Hall, if returned, would be their representative —ready to fight their battles, and to redress their grievances.

"Be careful, Mr. Hogarth, be careful," said Mr. Prentice, his Freeburgh agent. "Say nothing that may awaken jealousy or mistrust among our own party. You are much too frank in your assertion of your opinions—correct enough, no doubt; but your people are not prepared for them, and your majority is not so large that you can afford to lose a single vote."

"It certainly is not large in your burgh," said Francis.

"A minority of twenty-three is the most favourable thing you can expect here—I think twenty-four. At Swinton there is a certain minority of fourteen, which the least imprudence on your part would double. Auldbiggin and Plainstanes are ties at present, so your majority at Ladykirk should be large, to cover up our deficit. We have the hardest work to do, with the least credit; we should have double pay at these losing burghs," said Prentice, laughing. "But, for Heaven's sake! Mr. Hogarth, keep your friend Sinclair quiet. If he would only take a fever or something of that kind, to keep him in bed till he is wanted to vote, it would be a real service to the cause. You must address the electors to-night at a public meeting, and if possible, keep Mr. Sinclair away. We will get Mr. Hunter, and Mr. Thirlstane, and a few others, to speak in a quiet, taking way, and you need not say too much yourself, and do not make it too distinct. I have been agent here ever since the passing of the Reform Bill, and I should know what electioneering for these burghs is. Our people admire fine speaking —a few flowers of rhetoric. A little oratory and enthusiasm are very telling, but you need not pin yourself down to any definite course of action."

"I am, perhaps, too much disposed to an indefinite course of action; my principles I wish the electors to confide in, and I will act up to them as the occasion may offer," said Francis.

"But if you are too broad and direct in your assertion of principles, you may offend a third part of our sure votes. Nothing like a few good large words, with not much meaning, for these burghs. By the by, there is a deputation from Ladykirk come to wait on you, before you speak at this meeting. It is nearer for them to come here than to Swinton, so it is more convenient."

In fact there were two deputations awaiting the Liberal candidate—one from the electors of

Ladykirk, headed by Sandy Pringle, a man who had risen by the fabrication of woollen yarn from a weaver into a millowner, though not in a very large way; and the other from the non-electors of Newtown, who, though they had no legitimate right to take up Cross Hall's time, wanted a few words with him before election. Their spokesman was Jamie Howiston, of the class called in the south country, in common parlance, a *creeshey weaver*, who had not risen, and was not likely to rise.

Both deputations appeared at once, which to to a man less honest and direct than Francis, would have been inconvenient. He might have requested one to retire while he gave audience to the other, but he had so little the fear of Mr. Prentice before his eyes, that he really wished every elector and every non-elector to hear his sentiments and opinions as fully and openly as possible, and he received both of the deputations together.

He first heard what his own would-be constituents had to say, and satisfied them as to his perfect independence of the great Whig families, and that he meant to keep his judgment unbiassed by party politics.

"Then what aboot the extension o' the suffrage?" asked Sandy Pringle; "we want five-pound voters at Ladykirk."

"That is a question likely to be kept in abeyance during the sitting of this parliament," said Francis. "If it is brought forward I must say that I cannot at present vote for the extension of the suffrage."

"Oh! we thocht ye were an oot-an'-oot Leeberal—nane o' your finality Whigs that took ae bit step in the richt direction, and then durstna venture further. Ye maun vote for the five-pound vote if ye are to be oor man," said Sandy Pringle.

"We thocht ye would be for a baulder step than a five-pound vote," said Jamie Howison; "ye're said to be the puir man's friend. Is it fair that the like o' huz, that mak the country what it is, should hae nae voice in the elections? We're for manhood suffrage, an' the ballot, and we look to you to be oor advocate, for we thocht ye was to be oor member. If so be as we had had our richts, and had votes to gie, ye should hae them a'."

"It's fear—it's fear of the earl and the Freeburgh gentry that keeps him frae speakin' oot his mind," said Sandy Pringle; "but his heart is a' richt. He kens what's wanted, and if he's no thirled to the Elliotts and the Greys, he can vote as he thinks fit. I think we can depend on him."

"My friends," said Francis, "I wish to show no fear and no favour. I would not say to you what I would not say to the earl, nor to the earl what I would be sorry or ashamed to let you hear. I wish you to know, as clearly as I can explain them, my political principles, so that I may raise no unfounded expectations and disappoint no one wilfully or designedly. I think with you that it is a great evil that the working man has no voice in the election of the members of the Legislature. I hope to live to see the day—and I will labour to advance it—

when every man shall feel his influence in greater or less measure in that most important part of the duty of a free people; but have any of you ever seriously considered the effect which would follow the adoption in Great Britain, at present, of manhood suffrage, or even of reducing the franchise to a five-pound vote?"

"There would be far mair economy in the public service," said Sandy Pringle.

"There would be far less jobbery an' corruption in government pawtronage," said Jamie Howison, the Newtown weaver.

"They couldna swamp the consteetuencies by makin' fictitious votes," said Sandy.

"They micht bribe, if the franchise was limited," said Jamie Howison, "but with manhood suffrage an' the ballot, a man micht vote just as he liked, and huz working men hae oor richts, an' oor feelins, an' oor interests, just as dear to huz as pedigrees an' acres to the aristocracy. We want nae ten-hours bills—what richt hae parliaments to dictate to huz, an' keep huz frae sellin' a' we hae to sell, oor time an' oor labour? We want to be let alane to mind oor ain business, an no to be treated as if we was bairns that didna ken what was for their gude. Na, na, Maister Hogarth, when ye gied thae allotments to your hinds, ye showed that ye kent what they were fit for, an' ye *maun* see that the bigger a consteetuency is, the purer it is like to be."

"My friends," said Francis, "the effect of any great extension of the suffrage, as things are at present, would be to put the *whole* political power into the hands of the least educated classes of the community."

"Not the whole with a five-pound vote," said Sandy.

"Surely, not the whole, even wi' manhood suffrage," said Jamie. "We dinna want it all, only oor fair share."

"But it is in the nature of things," said Francis, "that it must be so. Your five-pound voters, Mr. Pringle, would outvote the ten-pound voters enormously. Your non-propertied electors, Mr. Howison, would out-vote even the five-pound voters, and would, in every constituency, carry their candidate by an overwhelming majority. This would not be good either for the country or for you."

"But the rich have the House of Lords, where they are paramount," said Sandy Pringle.

"A very feeble barrier that would be found against the abuses of democracy," said Francis. "You know well that in all emergencies the Lords must give way to the Commons."

"'Deed maun they," said Jamie Howison, "and the only chance of justice for huz that they maun. But, Maister Hogarth, ye see that property, an' education, an' rank, an' a' that, hae had it a' their ain way for hundreds o' years; it's time that we should hae oor turn. We arena like the French (in the days of the auld revolution); we would respect property. Even if we had owre muckle power, I think we wad mak nae bad use of it. It's hard to keep huz oot o' oor richts for ever because ye think we micht get a thocht mair than is good for us."

"But," said Sandy, sagaciously, "ye acknowledge that things as they are are na fair. What wad ye do to mend them?"

"You recollect a proposal of Lord John Russell's, some years ago, to reconstruct the electoral districts, by making them each return three members, and allowing each elector to vote for only two, so as to secure somewhat of the rights of minorities," said Francis.

"Oh! we misdooted that; for we thocht it was a treacherous thing on Lord John's part," said Sandy. "It is hard eneuch for the Leeberals to get their dues wi' this restricted franchise; an' this arrangement would mak the Tories stronger than they are noo."

"But is it not just that a minority of a third should be secured their third share in the representation?" asked Francis.

"Oh! ye're gaun to first principles, like your freend, Maister Sinclair. Nae doot it's a' richt, but it wadna answer. The third in ae district maun do without their man, an' in some other they micht hae the best o' it. That wad mak a' odds even."

"It does so in a great measure at present, though not so much so as I could wish, but every extension of the suffrage will tend to extinguish the minorities more and more. You cannot say that, in any electoral district you could name, with manhood suffrage the working classes would not enormously outnumber the educated classes."

"An' we maun wait for the reconstruction of the districts afore there is any chance o' justice?" said Jamie Howison. "I'm thinking we'll hae to tarry lang for our richts."

"Not so long, if you steadily keep in view that this is the *first* step. Lord John Russell's proposal was an approximation to a right principle, which, if it had been properly supported, might have given the fairest opening for greater reforms. If the Conservatives had voted for a really Conservative measure like this it would have been carried, but as it was brought forward by a political opponent they voted against it, though they now taunt him with introducing it. If the Whig party had seen the importance of it, and had vigorously supported it, it might have facilitated the extension of the suffrage, a measure which none of you can desire more earnestly than I do. I have conversed recently with some colonial gentlemen returned from Australia on the working of their manhood suffrage and the ballot, and from one of them I got an idea which appears to be a still better one than Lord John Russell's. It was embodied in a Municipal Bill for an infant city—that of Adelaide—drawn up by no less a person than Rowland Hill, then Secretary for the Colonisation Commissioners. I believe it was a deplorably bad town council for Birmingham that led his acute mind to ponder how to secure the rights of minorities, as it was the enormous expense of a correspondence he entered into on the subject of the coal-tax grievance that led him to make the calculations and to devise the system by which letters could be carried all over the kingdom for a penny.

"Well, and what does Rowland Hill say about thae minorities that ye care muckle for?" asked Sandy Pringle. "We hae a' great respect for Rowland Hill, and what he has to say on sic a subject should weel deserve a hearing at ony rate."

"He had an arrangement by which a quorum of the citizens could plump for one member of council, giving additional force to their vote. As they voted for one instead of eighteen, their vote was worth eighteen. By concentrating their vote they proportionally increased the power of it."

"Oh! we ken that plumping aye makes the vote mair valuable," says Sandy.

"Simply because your one vote is an advantage to your member, which is not given to any other; but this system gives a much greater reward for concentrating your vote. In Lord John's case the thing was incomplete, for unless you have the power of giving your two votes to one man, a minority of a third cannot get in a member. It is the cumulative power given by Rowland Hill that secures that minorities will not be extinguished. This subject will receive my careful attention, if I am returned for the burghs, for I consider it by far the most important question of the day, and if I can get the working classes to sympathize with me, I hope for success in time. Also a revision of the partnership laws, so as to afford every facility for working people to co-operate with each other, for it is only by that means that much can be done to improve their condition. Those Rochdale pioneers are going on most satisfactorily with their co-operative store, which they are now extending to other undertakings of greater magnitude, and I hope soon to see hundreds of similar associations in Great Britain and Ireland. But we want more freedom for limited liability companies, instead of so many difficulties being thrown in their way by over-legislation. I do not want to treat working people as children, but to encourage them to help themselves. I have had to work hard myself, and I know what it is."

"We will lippen to you," said Sandy Pringle, "and even though in some points we may not see things exactly as ye do, we want a man, an' no a mere thing to hae a name, an' be coonted like thae Fortescues and Turnbulls they are puttin' up."

"Little good, little ill, like a spale amang parritch, was that chap Trummle," said Jamie Howison.

"I am sorry I have been so short a time in the district, so that I am so imperfectly known to you, but I hope in time to show that I deserve your confidence," said Francis.

"But what about the ballot?" asked Jamie Howison.

"I have not quite made up my mind about the ballot," said Francis. "It is humiliating to confess to such ignorance, but there is so much to be said on both sides that I am puzzled. I should like public opinion to be so much improved that there would be no necessity for the ballot, but perhaps without it we cannot regenerate public opinion. I am quite open to conviction on either side on this as on many other political questions. Now I think you understand my principles. I will vote for whatever I think right, no matter from what side of the House or from what party it emanates. If you can trust to my intelligence and my integrity, you will vote for me, but I make no pledge."

"And we will ask nane," said Sandy Pringle, "we will lippen to you."

"But Maister Hogarth," said one of Jamie Howison's colleagues, "we look to you to mind the interests of them that has nae votes, and that is a large body, as ye ken."

"Yes, a very large body indeed, when you include the women and children," said Francis.

"Oh! the women and children," said the weaver, with a disappointed air, "I was na thinking of them; they are weel enuch—the men taks care o' them."

"Not always the best care in the world," said Francis. "Children need protective legislation to guard them from being overworked by parents and masters. Women are supposed to be free agents, but they do not really get all the rights of free agents—they should be empowered to protect themselves; the law should support them in obtaining their just rights. A wife ought not to be treated as a chattel; her earnings should be protected if she wishes it. And women, too, should have a wider field of labour. The difficulties which are thrown in the way of the weaker sex, in their attempts to earn a livelihood, both by law and by society, are very unworthy of the age we live in."

"Weel, Maister Hogarth, though I dinna just see the needcessity for bringing in women to compete wi' men at their trades, we could do ill without them at our mills, an' maybe ye're in the richt. Ye'll find us Whigs at Ladykirk united, and in that case ye're safe to carry the day," said Sandy Pringle.

Francis' return, however, ran more risk than either he or Sandy Pringle counted upon, for the suggestion carefully circulated by Fortescue, Toutwell, and the Tory agents, and feebly denied even by Mr. Hogarth's own Swinton agent, that he was a most unpopular man in the county, and that it was a mistake on the earl's part to support him, very nearly brought down a member of the Reform Club to force him to retire after his canvass was made, and his majority counted as small but safe. This shabby proceeding was only averted by the firmness of the Newtown Whigs, who were indignant at such treatment of a man so independent and so able as Mr. Hogarth, and they declared to the earl, through their agent, that if he did not with his party support Cross Hall for the burghs, they would set up Mr. Sinclair for the county and vote as one man for him, so that Lord Frederic would have an overwhelming majority over the Honourable James.

This threat of a certain defeat for the county restored the earl to his original intention of giving a mild support to Hogarth, who certainly would be a better man than Fortescue. There was the usual amount of personal abuse evelled at the banker's clerk—neither his father nor his mother was spared—there were caricatures of him in mean lodgings and shabby raiment, doing things for himself, which he recollected doing, and which he was not ashamed of having done. If Francis had been made a duke, instead of merely trying to be a member of parliament, he would never have been ashamed of his past life, nor would he have been distressed or disturbed by the unexpected honour. He would have taken it as a matter of course. His speech from the hustings was clear, manly, and dignified, and far surpassed that of Fortescue, even with Toutwell's diligent prompting. Mr. Sinclair's speech was received with cheers and hisses, but in print it read exceedingly well.

Then followed Mr. Toutwell's very rhetorical, very sarcastic, and, as his own party said, very telling speech; but to Jane, who read this report with the greatest interest, it told nothing.

The result of the poll was a majority of three in favour of Francis Hogarth, Esq., of Cross Hall, who was accordingly declared duly elected, and took his seat along with Lord Frederic (who had got in for the county by a majority of twenty-seven, much to the earl's chagrin, who had supported Cross Hall for nothing, after all) and the other members of the new parliament.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. PHILLIPS'S FIRST GRIEF.

Mrs. Phillips was somewhat annoyed at her husband's treating Elsie Melville on their continental tour more as a travelling companion than as a paid dependant. Where was to be the glory of this journey through France and Italy, of which she would have to boast all her life, if her maid and herself were to be on such terms of equality? In vain Mr. Phillips said he had disliked the difference that was made between the two sisters, and had only submitted to it in London on account of the servants, and that he was glad to take this opportunity of treating Elsie as her birth and education deserved. In vain he pointed out that French ladies conducted themselves to their dependants with less distance and hauteur than Englishwomen, and that in France it was proper to do as the French did. Mrs. Phillips felt offended, and, for the first time in her life, a little jealous—not very jealous, for she was so conscious of her own beauty, and so unconscious of her defects of mind and temper, that she had a strong substratum of confidence in her husband's affection—but at this time, Elsie was looking really very pretty; her movements were quick and graceful—a great contrast to Mrs. Phillips's slow, dignified, Juno-like deportment—and her conversation so sparkling and amusing, that she thought Mr. Phillips looked at her too much, and talked to her too much. When they spoke French together—for Mr. Phillips was trying to revive his more than half-forgotten schoolboy French, and found he could do it more easily with Alice than with the foreigners—Mrs. Phillips had a vague sense that they were talking about something that they did not want her to hear. Elsie would have enjoyed this trip exceedingly, but for Mrs.

Phillips's unreasonableness and caprices; but, even in spite of them, she brought away many delightful recollections of scenes and people. When on this tour, she felt as if she could write verses again, if she had only time and quiet.

When in Paris she called on Madame Lenoir with a letter of introduction from her cousin. She received Elsie very kindly, and asked her and the Phillipses to her "at homes;" but as all the people there talked French, Mrs. Phillips did not find them at all entertaining, and she thought French hospitality a very shabby affair. They did not remain long in Paris, but went down to Italy, and visited Florence and Rome. Mr. Phillips wished he had had his two eldest girls with him in Italy, and promised to himself that next time he took the journey they should accompany him.

When they returned to London they found that all had gone well in their absence—Francis had won his election; Jane appeared to be in excellent spirits; and the children had made good progress with their lessons. Mr. Phillips appeared to miss his old friend and neighbour, Brandon, very much, and could not find any one of his colonial acquaintances who could fill up the blank which his departure from London had made. Besides, they were always losing somebody out of their pleasant circle. Every mail steamer, and every fine clipper ship that sailed for Australia seemed to take one or more from them; and though new people did come, they did not appear to be so agreeable as those who went away. Mr. Phillips could not remain contented in London, so he proposed a trip to America with his wife and Alice as before; but Mrs. Phillips disliked the sea, and did not feel very well, so she said she would rather stay in London with the family, though it was getting rather late in the season for London. She did not care to go to Derbyshire without him, far less to go to Scotland; so, if he could be so cruel as to leave her, she would prefer London. If Emily had been a little older, Mr. Phillips would have taken her with him, for he disliked travelling alone, but she was too young, as he himself acknowledged.

Elsie could not understand the cause of Mrs. Phillips's peculiarly disagreeable conduct to herself lately, and she was almost on the point of leaving her, and taking another situation, when the children, one after the other, took scarlatina, and in such a house of sickness she—their favourite—could not be spared. All lessons, of course, were at an end. Mrs. Phillips looked into the nursery several times a day, and said how sorry she was to see the children so ill, and how she suffered from her anxiety about them; but it was Jane and Elsie who took the real charge of the little patients. The mother did not seem really alarmed, though the children were really very ill; the only thing she did that appeared like apprehension was making Jane write to Mr. Phillips to return to England without delay as soon as the children were seized with the fever. Jane also wrote to Dr. Phillips, and Vivian hurried to London, and stayed with his brother's family until his return, which was a great lightening of the load of responsibility which the sisters felt rested on them. In spite of every care and all that either doctor or nurses could do, little Eva fell a victim to the disease; and, after her death, Mrs. Phillips for the first time seemed to realize the danger of the others. Everything had gone so prosperously with her since her marriage; she had known no sorrow, and little annoyance; she had always had her husband at her side to smooth everything for her, so that she really scarcely knew what the contingencies and trials of life were; but this death, happening when the father who loved his children so dearly was absent, affected the indolent and generally unimpressible woman very strongly. She felt that she was somehow to blame about it. "What will Stanley say when he comes home? Oh, what will he say to me for losing his darling child? Oh, why did he go to America, and leave me with such a charge? And the others will be sure to die, too!"—were her constant lamentations.

Her grief made her quite unfit to take any charge of the survivors, and yet she was incredulous when she was told by her brother-in-law, or by the Misses Melville, that they were really recovering. It was not till her husband returned, which was as soon as he possibly could, and assured her that they were quite out of danger, that she gave any credit to it. Mr. Phillips felt the loss of one of his children more keenly than most men, but he was grateful to see that he was likely to save the others, and he did full justice to the care and attention which they had received from Vivian and Jane and Elsie.

Francis Hogarth was in London, attending a short parliamentary session, when the children were so ill, and was constant in his inquiries as to their health. Dr. Vivian Phillips forced Jane and Elsie out to hear their cousin make his first speech one evening, when the patients were decidedly convalescent. Jane was very much pleased with Francis' *début*, and though Elsie thought it rather tame, because it was not on an important subject, and was very calmly delivered, she was glad that he had not broken down, for it seemed a most imposing assembly for a stranger to address. Francis had visited the Derbyshire Phillipses, according to promise, after his election was over, and had been a good deal interested in Dr. Vivian, both on account of his own qualifications, and because Jane Melville had been interested in him. He now felt that Jane and the young physician were placed in very intimate relations with each other, and he naturally enough fancied that what he so much wished for himself would appear desirable to a man so acute and sensible as Vivian Phillips. Her calm temper, her promptitude, her method, were all shown to great advantage in a sick room. He forgot that Elsie's gentle tender ways and her overflowing sympathy might be equally attractive, but Dr. Vivian was quite used to all sorts of sick rooms, and to all sorts of nursing, and nothing was very striking to him, so that he fell in love with neither sister, though he liked them both very much.

Jane in particular was one of those women who may count herself fortunate if she meets with one real lover in her lifetime. William Dalzell was not to be counted, except perhaps as a blank, but by means of the most favouring circumstances, she had taken Francis Hogarth's heart into her possession, at least for a time, and this was her one prize in the strange lottery of love. No other attachment she was likely to inspire, as she felt herself, but her lover was not so clear-sighted. Dr. Vivian Phillips had a great respect for her, and enjoyed her society now and then as a pleasant change from the more insipid company of his sisters or their female acquaintances, but to spend a life with her would be too fatiguing. She seemed always to require him to think his best, to say his best, and to do his best in her company. Now a wife just intelligent enough to appreciate his own abilities, but willing in all things to be guided by him, was a desirable thing; but one so thoroughly his equal as Jane Melville would allow him no repose.

The children did not gain strength rapidly, and Emily in particular made a most tardy recovery. Her illness threatened permanently to weaken her constitution, particularly as winter was fast approaching, and she had felt that season in England very trying during the preceding year. Her uncle Vivian strongly recommended that she should winter in a milder climate to re-establish her health, and Mr. Phillips thought going to the south of France, where the girls might acquire the language without much trouble, would be a good arrangement; but when he mentioned it to Emily herself as an excellent idea, the child languidly put it aside.

"Why not take us back to dear old Wiriwilta?" said she. "We were never ill there. It is warmer and drier than France; and if Miss Melville and dear Alice go with us, we can learn lessons just as well there as here. I am tired of this great London, with its smoke and its noise."

Mr. Phillips was not a man to disregard a sick child's longing at any time; and when his brother said that, though he would regret the departure of the family from England, her native air was probably the very best she could have, and the long voyage in a good ship would benefit all the children, he turned his thoughts towards Australia, as he could not have believed possible three months before. The accounts he received from Dr. Grant as to his affairs were satisfactory enough, but the returns were not at all what he had expected; and he found that his London establishment was very costly. He might return to England in a few years, but the children were so young that they might go on with Miss Melville very well at Wiriwilta for some time. A very fine ship was on the berth; Mr. Dempster was going in it, and several other acquaintances; so that, though he would have preferred waiting for Brandon's report of how things were going on, he decided on leaving England before the season was so far advanced, on Emily's account.

Mrs. Phillips was in consternation at hearing her husband say he was really going to return.

"I thought you was never going back to Australia again, Stanley. You promised me you would not. What will you do about the children's education?"

"We will take Miss Melville with us, and I have no fear but that they will all do very well. Their music, certainly, is not provided for; but something may turn up for that. Our first business is to get them into good health."

"But Miss Melville will never go without Alice," said Mrs. Phillips.

"Probably not; but we can take Alice, too."

"I thought you said we was spending too much money, and that we must retrench," said Mrs. Phillips.

"Our children's education is the last thing I should think of retrenching on," answered her husband. "I have heard you say that Alice saves her salary in your milliners' bills. I have scarcely seen that proved, however, Lily; but Miss Melville saves me two hundred a year—that is clear enough, in black and white. It would be false economy to grudge her salary. Besides, Emily would be broken-hearted to part with Alice, so that I will offer to take both sisters with us, if they will come."

"We don't need such a housekeeper as Miss Melville at Wiriwilta. The house used to keep itself," said Mrs. Phillips.

"I know I had more trouble with it than was pleasant or convenient," said her husband. "I think things will go on much more comfortably there if Miss Melville continues with us; and after all their exceeding kindness and care of our poor dear children during their illness, I know that you too must be disinclined to leave them behind us."

"Oh, yes! really they were very good to the children. I was not strong enough to do much for them myself; and I don't feel inclined for the voyage just at this time. Let us go overland, and it will be sooner over."

"No; we cannot go overland; there is very little pleasure going overland with four young children, and as I suppose you will want one servant, as well as Miss Melville and Alice, you must think of the expense."

"I hate the sea, and you know I must be on shore before the end of February. And you recollect Mr. Brandon, for all his difficulties—saying he was ruined and all that sort of thing—would have gone overland, if he had only had his letters soon enough."

"Because he was only one, or, with Edgar, two, and time was of more importance to him than the difference in passage-money. A fine long voyage will restore our children to health, and it does not matter to me being a month or two longer on the voyage. I think we are sure to be in Melbourne time enough for you. If it were only you and myself, Lily, there is nothing I should like so much as the overland route. There is so much that I should like to see and to show to you, but under present circumstances it is impossible."

No arrangement could have suited Jane and Elsie so well as Mr. Phillips's proposal, as a personal favour to himself, that they should accompany his family to Melbourne. It was the destination they had long aimed at; and as they were neither of the station nor qualifications to obtain free passages in any immigrant ship, they joyfully agreed to his liberal offer.

"But," said Jane, "we must be perfectly frank with you. We have had a great desire to begin business in Melbourne together. We must tell you that we have often planned to join our savings to those of Peggy Walker, when she returns to Melbourne, as she will probably do ere long. Plans, of course, may not be carried out, but if ours are, we may leave you when you depend most on us. I am quite satisfied with my position in your family, but——"

"But neither you nor I are quite satisfied with your sister's," interposed Mr. Phillips. "It was the best arrangement that at the time could have been made; but you would never consent to go with us to Australia, and leave Alice to work here by herself; so, if she sees anything, either in Melbourne or in the bush that will suit her better, she is quite free to accept of it, and to leave Mrs. Phillips. Her services and your services to our children in this recent affliction can never be forgotten by us. I can assure you, Mrs. Phillips feels deeply indebted to both of you.

The party to Australia was increased from an unexpected quarter. Harriett Phillips had found that she had made no impression whatever on Mr. Hogarth. He had paid his visit to her father, but had taken almost no notice of her, who had been the person who invited him: in fact, he had markedly preferred her elder sister. His head had apparently been so full of politics, or something else, that he had not been half so agreeable as when she had met him in London, so that she was now very sorry that she had treated Mr. Brandon so cruelly during the last days of his stay in England. He certainly would have proposed if she had not discouraged him so much; it was really almost wrong in her to try to make him jealous, and she had succeeded only too well. After having entertained the idea that she could be married to him if she pleased for several months, she missed the pleasing excitement of a lover when she returned to her flat country life.

Now that her brother had actually made up his mind to leave England, she would also miss the change and the gaiety of a London winter, which she reckoned on having every year; so she astonished him by saying that she should like of all things to accompany them to Melbourne, and to see a little of bush life at that dear Wiriwilta that Emily was always talking about. She did not think that she would care to stay long, but for a year or two she really thought the life would be very pleasant for a change, just to see how things were done in these outlandish uncivilized places. She said, too, to her brother, that she thought she could be of service to Mrs. Phillips and the children. The society of Victoria was so indifferent, that it would be desirable to form a pleasant little coterie of one's own. The children's music should really be kept up; and she would be most happy to give them lessons. If her papa and Georgina and Vivian could spare her for a year or two, she should ı like extremely to go. She would feel sad when Stanley left for an indefinite p again.

Mr. Phillips was pleased with the prop it showed a more friendly feeling toward wife and family than she had ever evi before, so he offered to pay all her outv bound expenses, at any rate, for her. Il liked Australia, perhaps she might stay t with them altogether; or, indeed, she n find a home for herself there, and settle in colony. Harriett said such a thing had n entered her head—that she went merely a visit; but she set about getting her outfit very business-like way. It was an exceedi busy fortnight for Jane and Elsie; but by of great applications to ready-made warehoı everything was really got ready in time, Mr. Phillips had again to admire the though ness, the foresight, and the method which] Melville showed in all her arrangements, w

Elsie's busy fingers were employed from morning to night in doing an endless variety of little things that were needed to supplement the ready-made stock of clothes.

CHAPTER XVI.

ANOTHER GOOD-BYE.

Emily brightened up wonderfully at the prospect of a return to her old home. She seemed to gain strength every day, and no objection could be made to her going up to Edinburgh to pay her long-promised visit to Peggy Walker before she left England. Mr. and Mrs. Phillips and little Harriett accompanied her, and they took Jane Melville with them, for Elsie could not be spared from the needlework, and she did not wish so much to go to Scotland as Jane did.

Peggy was delighted to see her two nurslings, and also to see the young lady to whom she had given a home when she most needed one. Tom eagerly showed Jane what he had done in her absence, and received the commendation he deserved for his industry and his success. Grandfather was very weak, but in very tolerable spirits; this visit from Peggy's friends would be something for him to think on for th short remainder of his life. Mrs. Phillips's beauty and her fine clothes were something new to him; and the liveliness of the girls, and the politeness of their father, and Miss Jean's kind inquiries and kind looks all did him good.

Francis Hogarth met, by appointment, his cousin Jane at Peggy Walker's, where she meant to bid him good-bye, but he was not disposed to do so.

" You *must* come to Cross Hall, just to give a look at it before you bid the country farewell for ever. Mr. Phillips, do come round by Cross Hall, and let Jane see her old home once more."

" I want so much to see Cross Hall, that Alice tells us such pretty stories about," said Emily.

" Cross Hall! is that the name of your

place?" said Mrs. Phillips. "I would like to see it too, very much. Mr. Phillips will go, of course, if we all wish it."

Jane expected to suffer something in this farewell visit. It was not to be long, but it must be trying. Francis was cruel to ask it, and Mr. Phillips inconsiderate to accept of his invitation. There were some things to be done that were not painful. When they left the train and got into Francis' carriage—which was her uncle's old one, in which she had been used to ride—for a five-miles drive, they passed the gates of Moss Tower, and saw William Dalzell and his young wife riding out, and bowed to both. Then they went to Allendale, for Miss Thomson had expressed the strongest wish to see Miss Melville before her departure for Australia, and Jane, too, was very much pleased to see again one whom she held in such high esteem. There, for the first time, she saw Mr. Sinclair, whose appearance and conversation were quite equal to her expectations; but even he was not so great an object of curiosity to her as Mary Forrester—

a niece of Miss Thomson's several years older than the girl who had got her new frock at Mrs. Dunn's, in Elsie's time. Mary was then on a visit to her aunt, and apparently had the charge of two lovely children, cousins of her own, and grand-nephew and niece of Miss Thomson's. Their parents had gone a voyage in search of health, and Aunt Margaret had invited them to spend the winter at Allendale, and cousin Mary to keep them company. Jane thought she had never seen a more charming girl than Mary, who was evidently a great favourite with her aunt and Mr. Sinclair. Frank, intelligent, and graceful, she looked like a sunbeam in the house. The little Phillipses knew at once that she liked children, and wondered if she knew any of the delightful stories and ballads for which Elsie was famed. The little Munroes would take the Australians out of doors to see the poultry and the wonderful peacock, so Mary and Jane accompanied their charges. Mary had heard so much of Jane that she was disposed to be interested in her, while a new tide of ideas flowed into Jane's mind in relation to this stranger. In all probability this was the girl to whom Francis was likely to become attached when she left the country. And now that it was no unseen, and perhaps impossible, person whom she was to fancy as his wife, but a really pretty and amiable girl, did the thought now give her pain or awaken any sharp pang of jealousy? Her heart filled with many emotions at the thought, agitating and painful enough, but there was no jealousy. The more she fancied that Francis could love her, the more Jane felt that she must love her too.

" I really half envy you, Miss Melville," said Mary. " I wish I could do something for myself. You cannot think how anxiously I watched and wondered how you and your sister got on, and how delighted I was when you got the situation with Mrs. Phillips. Your cousin too—it must have been a sad weight off his mind. A generous man like him must have felt the terms on which he got the property very cruel."

"Yes," said Jane, "I know he felt it very much. We have great cause to thank God that things have turned out so well as they have done."

"Well, Miss Melville, do you know I feel quite ashamed to think of the amount of money which our family has cost Aunt Margaret; and after all she has spent on my education, and I really did try my best to learn too, I feel almost guilty in looking for a situation. There are so many wanting employment, that it seems like taking bread out of their mouths; and here am I, a full-grown woman, dependent on other people for mine. There are four girls of us, and only Grace at school now, but yet none of us are doing anything for ourselves. I spoke to Aunt Margaret about taking a situation, but she said she must have me at Allendale for the winter, on account of Archie and Maggie. After that is over, I may speak of it again. You are going to Melbourne, where I have got a brother doing pretty well; but one does not like to be dependent even on a brother. If you think there is any opening there for us, will you let us know through your cousin? we see him very often."

"Then you stay at Allendale for all this winter?" said Jane.

"Yes, and it will be very pleasant. I like living with Aunt Margaret so much, and John and I were always the two who drew together most of the family; and then Mr. Sinclair is the dearest old gentleman in the world."

"My cousin seems to be a favourite of your aunt's," said Jane.

"I never saw aunt take to any one at once as she did to him. What a pity your uncle did not take him home; it would have added very much to his happiness and to yours."

"It was not like the parting of strangers that took place between Jane Melville and Mary Forrester.

"Will you let me kiss you?" said Jane, timidly, as she said good-bye. This was rather a remarkable proceeding on Jane's part, for she was not addicted to the promiscuous osculation so common among young ladies, but she felt for Mary Forrester no common interest.

Mary frankly granted the little request, and they parted to meet again—when, and where, and how?

The party then went to Cross Hall, which was unaltered since Jane had left it; and while Mrs. Phillips and the children were resting after their journey, Francis took Mr. Phillips and Jane to look at the cottages he had built, and she mounted her old horse to ride out to see the allotments, which, even in this short time, showed signs of improvement. There were words of greeting to be said to everybody and to every animal about the place. The old servants were eager to tell her of all that had been done, and all that was to be done; they were glad to see her in good health, and apparently in good spirits. Many sad reports had reached Cross Hall about their straitened circumstances when in Edinburgh, and about poor Miss Elsie falling into a decline; and to see and hear that all was so well with the sisters was a pleasant thing for all who were attached to them. After all this had been gone through, and she went into the room which had been hers and Elsie's for fifteen years, to dress for dinner, the past, the present, and the future all came upon her at once, and she felt as if she could have given the world for the opportunity to give way. Everything was exactly as she had left it; all the furniture which had been taken to Edinburgh had been brought back and placed as it used to be.

"Can I help you, any way, Miss Jane?" said Susan, the upper housemaid, tapping at the door.

"No, thank you," said Jane: then recollecting herself, and hoping that the presence of the girl might help to steady her nerves—"but stop, do come in for a little, and brush my hair. I am too tired, I think, to do it; and my head aches a little."

"Is everything right here? The master said I was to tell him exactly how things used to be, that ye should see nae change."

"All is right," said Jane. "If Elsie were here I might forget that I ever had left Cross Hall; and I see that our people have no cause to miss us, so that we can go to Australia with lighter hearts."

But for all this talk about a light heart, the tears would come into Jane's eyes slowly as she looked out to the familiar scene and heard the well-known voices, and thought that to-morrow she must leave Cross Hall and Scotland and Francis for ever.

Mr. Phillips helped her well to keep up conversation at dinner and during the evening, but after the children had gone to bed and Mrs. Phillips had retired, he thought the cousins might wish to have their quiet talk by themselves, and wished them good-night.

"You have not been in the library yet, Jane," said Francis; "shall we adjourn there? I have a little, a very little business to talk over with you, and I am going to bid you our real farewell to-night, for I am not going to see you on board ship. I dare not."

Jane followed him to the library. She had not been in it since they had searched through her uncle's papers, and had read the letters of Madame de Vericourt together. Francis took from the drawer, which still contained those yellow letters, a paper on which was some writing and figures, and a parcel of bank-notes.

"You recollect that you asked me to store the furniture that you left in your room till you saw fit to claim it. After Elsie decided on staying at Mrs. Phillips's, I sent to Peggy's for what you had there, as I think I wrote to you, and Susan saw that everything was placed just as it used to be. Was it so?"

"Yes; exactly so."

"I do not want to part with any of it, but I got a valuation taken of it the other day, which you see here, and I give you the market price for all the things. There is no favour in such a commercial transaction as that surely, so here is a little addition to your slender capital. You will find the money all right, I think, odd shillings and all."

"All right," said Jane, compelling herself to count the notes according to her old methodical way.

"And you like my cottages, Jane, and you hope great things from the allotments, and you were pleased with my two speeches in parliament? Oh! Jane, if I am ever worth anything I will owe it to you, and now you are going to put half the globe between us, I feel as if I had lost more than half of myself."

Jane could scarcely trust herself to speak. "It is better so, Francis."

"If you miss me as I know I will miss you, write and tell me so. You *know*, Jane, I love you," said Francis.

"I feared it."

"Why should you fear it? Is it not the most natural, the most reasonable thing I could do? If you loved me you would not fear it."

"I thought that in all your many avocations, and especially in public life, that you would forget this fancy, but it is well that I must leave the country, for then I may hope that you will form another attachment. Write to me when you do so, that I may know I have not permanently deprived you of domestic happiness, and that I may pray for you both. You think you owe me much, but to you I owe still more. Till I knew you I had no religion, I never knew the privilege of prayer. Even though we may never meet again on earth, we can look forward to a happy meeting in heaven."

"Now, Jane, when you women bid good-bye to a friend of your own sex, as dear to you as I am to you—for in a sense I am dear to you, am I not?"

"Yes, very dear to me," was wrung out of Jane, by Francis' earnest looks and words.

"Well, when you bade farewell to Peggy this morning, she took you in her arms and kissed you—you kissed Mary Forrester, a stranger to you—and you are going to leave me—perhaps for ever—me, who would give my life to serve you, who would give up fortune, fame, almost duty for your sake, and you will shake hands coldly, and say—'Good-bye, Francis.'"

"Not coldly, my friend—my brother. Do

not think I can part from you so," and by an irresistible impulse, she turned to her cousin, and felt herself folded for a few seconds in his arms, and kissed with passionate tenderness.

" This is what might have been ours for life, but for this accursed will, and your notions of what is best for me, and perhaps a natural disinclination towards my suit. Reflect—think—before it is too late; make your choice;—love in poverty and obscurity, perhaps—but still love."

" Love is not all life, either for you or for me;—it is better for us to part."

" Then you make your choice;—but Jane, if you change your mind, write to me, and let me know. I tried to leave off writing at one time; but it did no good, for I could do nothing that did not remind me of you. Then it *must* be good-bye. May God bless you, my beloved one, now and for ever!"

" May God bless you, my dear Francis, and now farewell!"

Another sort of farewell from her dismissal of

William Dalzell! Centuries had seemed to have passed over her since that first eventful day of her life. She scarcely could identify herself with the woman who had so calmly and so kindly extinguished a fancied partiality, as she sat down in her own room and trembled from head to foot at the thought of the pain she had given, and the love she had rejected. In the one case she was perfectly certain that she had done right, in this she was not by any means so clear. As she heard her cousin restlessly pacing up and down the library, she felt tempted to go to him and say she would share his fortunes, and even destroy them for him if he wished it. She looked at the mirror, and wondered at her being able to excite such an attachment; she looked into her own soul, and did not see anything in it to warrant a man in giving her such a power over him. Duty was clear as to the dismissal of William Dalzell, and the result had proved that she was in the right; and now, when duty was so terribly difficult, surely time, that tardy, but certain adjuster of life's inequalities, would justify her both to Francis and herself. William Dalzell's love had appeared to evaporate during their parting conversation; but Francis' had grown more intense and passionate till she felt she could scarcely look at him.

But it was true that she had admired his speeches, and that she was ambitious for his success in all his plans. Every one who knew anything about the subject said that Francis Hogarth was the most promising young man who had entered the walls of parliament at this recent general election. He had given great attention to public business; he had mastered the details with ease; and the principles seemed to be intuitive with him.

He had become acquainted with a small band of outsiders like himself, men of independence and originality, who kept aloof from party, but whose votes were of importance to both parties, and whose approbation was of far more value than that of the strongest partizan. No one could tell to what height he might not rise from such a beginning; the ministry had noticed him favourably, and he was as likely as not to be offered office before the parliament had expired.

Mr. Sinclair had told her how his hopes rested on the new member for the burghs, and how many public matters and reforms they talked over together with constant reference to first principles.

Jane was proud of the conquest she had made, and proud of her influence over a man so able, and so upright; but now she felt it was dangerous to see too much of him, and his parliamentary life had brought him into far more frequent contact with her now than ever before. She had led him so far in the right direction, but now she feared for her own resolution; she knew she could not withstand many such scenes as she had just gone through, and she saw that there was great wisdom and propriety in her leaving the country that he lived in. From her distant home across the ocean, she could hear of his labours and his triumphs, and, she hoped, after a time, of his happiness. But while she reasoned with herself as to the propriety of leaving him, she felt all the bitterness of the lifelong separation. She could no longer disguise the truth from herself—he was as truly half of her as she was of him—and she shivered at the thought of a life to be gone through in which she should never more see his face, or hear his voice. It was as sad a night, and as sleepless, as that she had spent in her cousin's house in Edinburgh, when all doors had seemed to be shut against her, except the faint chance of a sub-matronship in a lunatic asylum. Now, two doors were open to her—one to a life of toil and dependence for herself and probably a happy life for Elsie, at the antipodes; and the other, a life of love with the man who had all her heart, and who deserved it all, with a dependent life for Elsie. Even though her own hand had closed the door, she could not help lingering at the threshold, and grieving that she was shut out from the only paradise she cared for.

So the good ship sailed next week, bearing

Jane from the man who loved her, and whom she loved, and Elsie and Miss Harriett Phillips towards the man whom they both thought loved them.

END OF VOL. II.

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